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A Modern Comedy of Errors.

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CHAPTER XX.

DOROTHY'S COURAGE.

DR. CROFTON and Miss Dursley were on the best of terms for a week after Chloe's invasion of the surgery, but every morning Dorothy rose with the feeling that before evening the armistice would cease and war be declared. The domestic weather was too fine to last, and all this sunshine would, she knew, be followed by a spell of grey days, if not by a storm.

On the Friday on which Sir Peter and Bertha and Chloe went to Eastwich, a message came for Dr. Crofton from a country patient, which he could not understand. A word with Dorothy would have sufficed for him to gain the information he required and perhaps save him a ten miles' journey.

As ill luck would have it he was not feeling well, he had no other patients in the same direction, and he did not want to go to this Mrs. Brown unless it were absolutely necessary. Dorothy could tell him, and he went in search of her. He looked in the garden and greenhouse, in the two sitting-rooms, but there was no sign of Miss Dursley; then he observed a strong scent of Seville oranges pervading the house, and was informed by a servant that Miss Dursley was in the kitchen making marmalade.

"How long will she be?"

"All the morning, sir. Shall I tell her you want her?"

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"Certainly not," said Crofton angrily, as he stalked back to the surgery.

On his way he passed the kitchen, the door of which was open and revealed the cook standing over a copper stewpan stirring the golden pulp as if she were performing the most important duty in life; while by the table sat Miss Dursley, vested in a holland apron and bib, cutting the rich orange-red peel into slices, and so absorbed in her task that she did not look up as he passed.

This negligence on her part, coupled with a large pile of golden fruit by her side, added to her guilt; he banged the surgery door, and stamped up and down the room with his hands in his pockets, muttering his grievance to the walls and drugs.

"Making marmalade? If there is one more indigestible thing than another in the world, it is home-made marmalade. The woman must want to poison me; not that I shall risk my life by eating it. Upon my word, it is too annoying; one word from her might save me a ten-mile journey, and there she is frittering away her time cutting up orange-peel; a substance, in my opinion, altogether unfit for human food. And sitting in the kitchen too! If she had only had the sense to carry her trash into the dining-room I might have spoken to her, found out incidentally what I want to know, and given her my opinion on home-made marmalade. I must reserve that now till the first time it appears on the breakfast table; and ill as I feel I must drive over to Brandham before I start on my usual round. Fly! Where the plague is that imp?"

Fly was at that moment up in the granary, having a rat hunt with James and two ferrets; so the stable bell was clashed violently more than once before their excitement allowed them to hear it.

"There is your bell, James; the doctor ain't in a hurry, seemingly," said Fly.

"Just you go and answer it, and say I am coming as soon as I have put these ferrets into the cage."

"No, James; if it is all the same to you I'd rather you went. I might have to take out a summons for assault against the doctor if I were to go."

"James! Fly! Is there a servant in the place at all? What is the meaning of this conduct? Here have I been ringing and

shouting for the last ten minutes, and neither you nor that good-for-nothing boy pay the slightest attention."

"We are having a rat hunt, sir," faltered James.

"Put the bay into the dog-cart immediately; I shan't want you; I can't wait for you. I'll take Fly and drive myself," said Dr Crofton.

James obeyed these orders, grumbling all the while at a stranger driving his horses, and a Londoner too, who was not used to driving. He wished his master was at home; and if the report that Dr. Crofton was going to buy the practice was true, he should not stay.

"Where is Brandham?" asked Dr. Crofton, as he got into the dog-cart.

"Through Caldecott, sir; there is a bad hill just before you come to the village," said James. "And if you don't let the bay down before you get back I shall be surprised," he added to himself, as he watched the doctor drive off with Fly behind, the latter making a parting grimace at the offended groom.

They reached Brandham safely. Dr. Crofton paid his visit, found it was quite unnecessary for him to have gone, and drove off at a furious pace; he had barely time to pull the horse in before they reached the Caldecott hill, and just as they got towards the bottom the bay slipped and fell, Dr. Crofton was thrown into the fence and Fly on to the road. Fly was the first to pick himself up, and rubbing his knees with his palms, he limped howling to the doctor, who was struggling to his feet, feeling very much shaken, but not much hurt.

"Where is the pain, my boy? Let me see if you have broken any bones," said Dr. Crofton, and having satisfied himself that neither he nor Fly were much the worse for their fall, he turned his attention to the horse.

"The shaft is snapped; it may last till we get home. We must take the horse out," said Dr. Crofton, as he proceeded with Fly's help to do so. One of the horse's knees was cut, but not badly, so the accident might have been worse; it was bad enough, in Dr. Crofton's opinion, and certainly to let another man's horse fall is about as unpleasant a thing as one can do; so the doctor's future depression was perhaps excusable.

He did not speak a word till he got home, when he told James what had happened, and asked if they could hire a dog-

cart while this one was being mended, for Dr. Dursley had only a sulky and a dog-cart.

"I must ride Paris this next round ; saddle her while I write to your master to tell him of the accident."

"Dr. Dursley won't think much of it, sir ; the bay has been down before. I'll turn him out to grass for a week, and he'll be all right again," said James, who thought Dr. Crofton looking very ill.

The doctor went into the dining-room and helped himself to a glass of wine and a biscuit ; raged against Miss Dursley for not coming to see how he was, though as she didn't even know he had returned, far less that he had been thrown out of the dog-cart, there was every excuse for her, not to mention the marmalade.

He wrote to Dr. Dursley and then told James he must go to the "Crown" and hire some trap, as he did not feel well enough to ride ; he then started off about half-past twelve on a second round, from which he returned about three with a splitting headache. He declined lunch, saying he could not eat at such an hour of the day, and went to his room to lie down for an hour.

Dorothy had heard of the accident from Fly, but she dared not mention it to the doctor, until he told her about it ; she was afraid, too, to ask after his health, though a glance at his face told her he was suffering.

About tea-time he came into the drawing-room, took his tea in silence, and then went to the surgery to dispense the medicines ; at dinner he ate little and said less, and Dorothy tried in vain to keep up a conversation ; he disappeared into his own room afterwards, and she saw no more of him that night. The next morning he was so stiff he hardly knew how to get up ; he was feeling weak from the severe headache of the previous day, and he was in a vile temper into the bargain. He was quite aware of this latter fact, but that did not mend matters, and the sight of a jar of the offending marmalade on the breakfast table revived all his anger against Dorothy.

The accident was, in his opinion, entirely her fault. If she had not been wasting her time concocting a villainous compound likely to ruin the digestion of an ostrich, if that bird ever ventured to taste it, he would not have gone to Brandham that morning, consequently he would not have let the horse down.

It was clearly entirely Miss Dursley's fault ; the logical sequel to her marmalade-making was undeniably his bad driving ; and she actually had the effrontery before breakfast was over to offer him some of the said preserve.

"No, thanks," in a very sarcastic tone.

"But you must ; I am famed for my marmalade, and really this is uncommonly good ; you will hurt my feelings if you refuse. I spent all yesterday morning making it."

"I am sorry you had nothing more profitable to occupy your time," said Dr. Crofton, leaving the table.

"Dear me, what a bear ! Does the man suppose I am not to make marmalade because he does not happen to like it ?" said Dorothy.

All that day Dr. Crofton felt wretchedly ill, and all that day he inwardly raged against Dorothy ; nothing she did or did not do was right.

If she had ventured to inquire after his health he would have been furious ; because she did not do so, he considered her unfeeling. Had she alluded in the remotest degree to his accident, he would have been mortally offended ; because she did not, he sulked. He did not say half-a-dozen words beyond "yes" and "no" to Miss Dursley the whole of that day ; the following morning he was better in health, but Dorothy unfortunately remarked at breakfast that there was a letter for him from her brother Paul, and this offended him, so his temper was worse that day than ever.

She knew what had put him out, and was angry with herself for having mentioned it ; but the writing caught her eye as she took the letters out of the post-bag, and she spoke on the impulse of the moment. The letter was chiefly about the writer's health, and only alluded to the accident to say it was the horse's fault and he must be sold. Evidently Mr. Dursley was far from well, and this fact, because he knew it would worry Miss Dursley if she were aware of it, only added to Dr. Crofton's depression.

"Dursley will break down, I foresee, and that will half break her heart, for she worships him. I hope she won't ask me how he is ; I shall avoid her as much as possible, so as not to give her the opportunity," thought Crofton.

Meanwhile Dorothy Dursley was making up her mind that she was not going to stand much more of Dr. Crofton's bad

temper. She would give him another day or two, and then if he did not recover it, she would take him at his word, and tell him plainly what she thought of him.

"He won't want to hear it twice, I can tell him; for I feel so angry with him, I could shake him; and before I speak to him I'll work myself up into such a passion, I shan't care what I say. I couldn't do it in cold blood, I should not dare to. I'll give him till to-morrow evening, and then if he is still in this depressed state, I'll tell him how disgracefully he is behaving."

All that day Dr. Crofton avoided Miss Dursley. The next morning he felt better, and was prepared to be more agreeable, but the tone of voice in which Dorothy greeted him, and her manner, warned him she was getting tired of his temper, and was not going to put up with it much longer.

"I wonder if she'll dare to pitch into me, as I asked her to do; I think I'll keep it up a little longer, just to see. I don't believe she'll have the courage to do it, though she is evidently angry. I'll watch her till this evening, and then, if she says nothing, I'll go into the drawing-room as usual."

So another day passed, and to all appearances Dr. Crofton was still in the sulks; but he was better in health, Miss Dursley saw, for his appetite had improved. At dinner that evening Dorothy was evidently excited; she laughed and talked to Miss Sanders and Crofton, and paid no apparent attention to his monosyllabic replies.

She was looking uncommonly well; her black dinner-dress, showing her white arms and throat, suited her, and her eyes, which were not her best point, were brighter than usual.

"Shall you be at home all the evening, Dr. Crofton?" said Dorothy as she rose from the table.

"Yes."

"I wish to speak to you later on, please."

"Yes."

Dr. Crofton answered with well-acted indifference, but no sooner was the door closed on the two ladies than he jumped up, thrust his hands into his pockets, chuckled to himself, and muttered in a tone of delight:

"She is going to tackle me. What a joke."

Miss Dursley, who was feeling very nervous, but was bent on having it out with the doctor, waited till the dinner things were

all cleared away, and then went to the dining-room, where Crofton was sitting over the fire. He rose on her entrance and stood with his back to it.

"Pray don't take the trouble to rise, Dr. Crofton; after the treatment I have received from you for the last few days, such a piece of courtesy is quite unnecessary," said Dorothy, closing the door with a little bang and advancing as far as the dining-table.

"I am going to have it," thought Dr. Crofton.

"May I offer you a chair?" he said.

"No, you may not. I prefer to say what I have come to say standing; I am not afraid of interruption," said Dorothy, sarcastically.

"I am listening."

"I am glad to hear it. You have done little else in the way of conversation for the last four days. You told me a little while ago, if you were seized with one of these silent fits again, to rout you out of them. I have come to do so."

"Indeed!" said Crofton, with assumed dignity.

"Yes, and allow me to tell you I consider your temper has been simply unbearable. For four whole days you have scarcely deigned to open your lips to me, and so far as I can discover the sole cause of my offence was I happened to make some marmalade which displeased your lordship. Am I right in supposing this is what put you out of temper?"

"I shall not answer."

"Silence gives consent. Well, all I can say is, if you are not ashamed of yourself, I am ashamed of you. You are, without any exception, the worst-tempered man I ever met in my life—the very worst."

"Thank you."

"I have lived seven years with Paul, and he has not shown one tenth part of the temper you have shown the last week in the whole seven years; if he had I could not have stayed with him. He is a little impatient sometimes, all men are; but it is this dreadful silence of yours that tries me so; it is like a black cloud hanging over the house, and affects everybody in it. The very children and servants felt it, and though I told them you were ill, I may as well tell you I believe your disease is chiefly temper, and I hope for our sakes, if not for your own, you'll make an effort to be a little more agreeable for the future."

Without waiting for an answer, Miss Dursley turned on her heel and went back to the drawing-room, trembling with anger, partly real, partly assumed, while Dr. Crofton threw himself into his chair highly amused with the scene.

"I didn't think she'd dare to do it; she is a plucky woman, and I deserved all she said, but she need not have said it with quite so much force; she seemed to thoroughly enjoy slanging me. Like a woman, if you give her an inch, she always takes an ell. I wonder she did not tell me to apologize when she was pointing out the way in which I ought to tread, to me. I suppose I shall have to do so, and when I have done it, I'll tell her I pretended to sulk to-day to see if she would dare to keep her promise. That will rouse her temper if she has any; her anger just now was legitimate if it were real, which I doubt. Well, humble-pie is not a dish to my taste; however, I suppose I must eat a slice, so here goes."

With this he rose and went to the drawing-room, the door of which was ajar, and to his surprise he heard sobs. Was it possible Miss Dursley was crying? He pushed the door gently and peeped in, and sure enough there sat Dorothy, her elbows on her knees, showing her pretty dimpled arms, her face in her hands and her handkerchief on her lap.

He hesitated a moment, and then stepped quietly away to wait till the storm was over. He was just in time to hear her start up, saying:

"What an idiot I am to cry!"

The truth was she had had to brace herself up to speak to Dr. Crofton. It had cost her a great effort to overcome the shyness she felt at doing so. This moodiness during the last few days had really tried her, body and soul, for she cared more for this man's friendship than she was aware of, and his displeasure vexed her. In short, she was rather overstrained, and this fit of tears was the natural result. A man swears under similar pressure; a woman weeps. Modern woman goes to a music hall or a political meeting on the top of an omnibus, if she lives in London; or for a ride on a bicycle, if she lives in the country, to relax the tension. But Dorothy Dursley was as far removed from a modern woman as heaven is from places under the earth.

"I hope I have not been too forward. I wonder what Paul

would have thought if he had heard me?" thought Dorothy, as she dried her eyes and picked up some needlework.

Presently the door opened and Dr. Crofton came into the room, walked up to her and held out his hand.

"Thank you. I deserved all you said to me."

Dorothy flushed crimson as she put her hand in his, and, looking up at him, said:

"You asked me to do it, or I should never have ventured to say a quarter of what I did say."

"I know I did. I meant it. I liked it."

He was holding her hand very tight and looking into her eyes as he said this in a way he had never done before, and Dorothy felt a rush of joy in her heart as she laughed and tried gently to draw her hand away.

"I shan't do it again, then. I wanted it to be a punishment, not a pleasure."

"Yes, you will do it again if it is necessary. But you must do more next time; you must make me apologize. That will be a real punishment. I am rather giving myself away to tell you what is a punishment, since you seem so anxious to inflict it."

"I certainly think you ought to do so, though I don't care to receive an apology. I would just as soon make one," said Dorothy, who by now had withdrawn her hand, and was leaning back in her chair, while Dr. Crofton stood close by her on the hearthrug, looking down at her.

"I would not—moreover, I don't mean to—apologize this time. There were extenuating circumstances of which you are ignorant, and I received great provocation."

"From whom?"

"From you, among others."

"From me?"

"And from that woman at Brandham, from the servants and from the horse. Moreover, to-day I was only pretending to be cross. I wanted to see if you would have the courage to say anything to me."

"Then it was too bad of you. I won't do it again. You may sulk as long as you like another time. I won't rouse you."

"Yes, you will. We shall have a very serious quarrel indeed if you don't. Besides, it is really the greatest kindness you can do me when I get these fits of depression; they are not all

temper," said Crofton with a sigh, meant to conquer Dorothy's reluctance.

It succeeded.

"Very well, if you get another attack I'll do my best, but I shan't let it last so long next time. I shall nip it in the bud if I can, and if I fail what is to happen?"

"Then you must tell me plainly you won't speak to me again till I beg your pardon. Will you do it?"

"Yes, but I don't think you will apologize," said Dorothy, trilling out one of her pretty laughs.

"I will to you, though I would not to any one else on earth," said Crofton in a low voice.

And perhaps it was just as well that Miss Sanders came into the room just then to say Nona would not go to sleep till her aunt Dorothy went up and kissed her, a function Miss Dursley, being otherwise engaged, had forgotten to perform that evening.

And Miss Sanders privately thought Dr. Crofton and Miss Dursley were getting very intimate, so intimate that she would not be surprised to hear any day that they were engaged.

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. HALKETT MAKES MISCHIEF.

MRS. HALKETT had very much recovered from her fainting fit when Mrs. Malcolmson and the Danes entered Sir Peter's drawing-room after dinner was over. She had had time to reflect, and had decided on her next move, which was to attack poor Bertha in Sir Peter's absence, and blight her hopes. To pave the way for this onslaught she entreated Chloe to play to her: nothing, she declared, soothed her nerves so much as stringed music; its vibrations were as salutary as a galvanic shock.

Chloe, while inwardly thinking what rubbish the woman talked, complied with her request, and under cover of the music Mrs. Halkett proceeded to administer quite a different kind of shock to Bertha, by whose side she seated herself.

"I wanted to have a little talk with you. I see you are a favourite of Sir Peter's, so perhaps he has told you how intimate he and I have been since his wife's death," she said in a low voice to

Bertha, while Mrs. Malcolmson took "forty winks" in the absence of the gentlemen.

"No, indeed, he has never mentioned your name to me," said Bertha, feeling a sudden chill come over her.

"That was very naughty of him, but men are often very shy when about to commit matrimony, particularly if it be a second venture."

"I was not aware that Sir Peter was going to marry again," said Bertha coldly, but she hid the bitter disappointment she felt, and the anger at having been trifled with that was rising in her heart.

"They are not engaged, then," thought Mrs. Halkett. "We have not announced it yet," she answered, after a slight pause.

It was a bold stroke, and she hesitated a moment before making it. When made she saw it had taken effect, for Bertha lost every particle of colour, and bit her lips to restrain herself from making any other sign of suffering.

At that moment Sir Peter entered the room, and, walking straight up to the sofa on which they were sitting, said to Bertha:

"You don't look well. Is this room too hot for you?"

"No, thanks. I am perfectly well," said Bertha in as frigid a tone as she could assume.

"It is I who fainted, Sir Peter, not Miss Dane. You seem to be mixing us up rather," said Mrs. Halkett, moving closer to Bertha, so as to make room for Sir Peter, who could not refuse to take the seat she offered him without being rude.

Bertha rose and walked to the other end of the room, and hoped it would soon be time for them to go home. Never in her life had she felt so intensely miserable as she now did. She thought of the night her father died, which till now was the unhappiest she had ever known, but it was a sharper pain she was feeling this evening.

"I feel dead myself, and all I want is to go away and be buried," she thought.

A few paces from her stood Chloe, playing some wild, weird music, and driving young Malcolmson to distraction, for already, in answer to some of his speeches, she had told him she was wedded to music, and had given him to understand he need not trouble himself to make love to her.

Certainly this was an unlucky dinner-party. Mr. Malcolmson knew he should live to curse the day he met this little white witch, with her black eyes and delicious little silky curls of blue-black hair, for one of which he would have given his commission. There stood Chloe, now bowing to him with mock courtesy, thinking of Paul, and feeling a wicked desire, which she tried to check, to make this man miserable because she and Paul were so unhappy.

Why should this tall, fair, handsome young fellow escape? Why should he not know what a sad business life is as well as she and Paul? He had entered the room that night as if the whole world belonged to him, and was made for his pleasure. Well, he would go home knowing that at least one little bewitching girl would never belong to him.

And she played the merriest things she knew, and laughed, not because she was happy, but because life seemed so strange and the world such a queer place, and because it was better to laugh and to make other people laugh than to cry; and because it is not usual to cry at dinner-parties, even when the man you love is in prison, and there are other still more insuperable barriers than locks and bolts to your union.

So there were three miserable people in that room—Chloe, young Malcolmson and poor Bertha. Mrs. Halkett could not be called happy, although she was pinning Sir Peter to her side, for she knew well enough that though she might succeed in preventing him from marrying Bertha, she would never induce him to marry her.

Sir Peter saw she had upset Bertha in some way, and was seeking to get away and endeavour to find out what she had been saying to cause such a change in Bertha's manner and appearance. During dinner she had been so happy she had looked almost pretty, for the black dress she wore suited her. Now she was sitting alone, looking the picture of misery.

Sir Peter was disturbed and annoyed, and foresaw trouble both with Bertha and Mrs. Halkett, and the memory of his dead wife rose to his mind, and in spite of his success, his fame, and his wealth, he felt life was at best only a compromise between good and evil.

It is, however, unfair to strip the masks off so many faces and show the skeletons under the conventional smiles we are all

more or less forced to wear. The young believe the smiles are genuine: for pity's sake let them cherish such faith; at least hide the unalterable sadness of life from them till they reach middle age, for after all

"God's in His heaven. All's right with the world."

The sadness is only a husk, underneath it is the kernel; the husk is our share in this world, the kernel in the next; we are like the children; we can't eat our cake here and have it—here-after.

And life is very short.

Life seemed interminable to Bertha Dane that evening. Sir Peter only escaped from Mrs. Halkett when Bertha rose to go; he went to the door with her, and wrapped her shawls round her, and put her into the hansom, while Mr. Malcolmson did the same for Chloe, only the latter took longer about it; but Sir Peter could not get a smile from Bertha, and she withdrew her hand quickly from his grasp.

His manner, which was as tender as ever, only angered Bertha; how dared he make love to her when he was engaged to that bold, fast, odious woman?

"How can Sir Peter ask that Mrs. Halkett to meet us? She is dreadfully bad form," said Chloe.

"She is engaged to Sir Peter," said Bertha coldly.

"That woman! Oh, Bertha! It is impossible! I don't believe it."

"She told me so," faltered Bertha with a little sob she could not for the life of her control. Chloe's little hand was slipped into her sister's and squeezed it tight.

"It is an l-i-e. I am sure it is. You dear old thing, you. I know it is you he means to marry, if you will have him."

"No, it is not; he has deceived me; it is all at an end. Never speak of him to me again, Chloe. I did not think men could be so cruel."

"I am sure it is a mistake, Bertha. Isn't he going to Eastwich with us to-morrow?"

"I believe so; but I can't go if he does, Chloe. I will never see him again if I can help it, never," sobbed Bertha as the cab stopped at their lodgings.

This, of course, Chloe knew was nonsense; Bertha would be

obliged to see Sir Peter again whether he was engaged to Mrs. Halkett or not. At the same time she saw Bertha could not go to Eastwich with him the next day, and she could not go without Bertha; so she very reluctantly gave up going, and both girls went to bed with a poor opinion of the happiness of this world.

At breakfast Chloe's aspect of the world changed, for Bertha, who had had no sleep, suggested that they should go to Eastwich by an earlier train than the one Sir Peter was to travel by, lunch in the city, and do their best to avoid meeting Sir Peter. Chloe was enchanted at this proposal, and they found by travelling by a slow train they could leave Eastwich shortly after Sir Peter would reach it, so they would be able to avoid him entirely.

Now Sir Peter decided that morning while he was shaving that he would propose to Bertha that day; Mrs. Halkett had evidently made some mischief between them, but he would have an explanation in the train and find out what she had told Bertha. To his surprise and disgust, when he reached the station there was no sign of Bertha or Chloe; he searched the train, and satisfied himself they were not there, and then had to take his seat in a very bad temper. Evidently it was a serious matter; Bertha was mortally offended. What the devil had that woman been saying to her?

If Paul were not ill he would have given up the long, tiring journey and gone to the Danes' lodgings and asked for an explanation; but he was anxious about his brother's health, and his visit this time was professional.

He found Paul looking better and in better spirits than he had expected, but the reason for this improvement was soon explained.

"I am afraid you'll be disappointed, old fellow; the Danes have not come," said Sir Peter.

"Yes, they have come and gone; they left about twenty minutes ago. I wonder you did not meet them."

"Been and gone! They were dining with me last night, and arranged to come with me by this train. What do they mean by such conduct?"

"I don't know. Miss Bertha looked ill and was out of spirits; whereas Chloe was in one of her wildest moods, and gave me a most amusing account of your little dinner, which does not appear to have been very successful—was it?"

"I suppose not. It seems to have had anything but the effect I wished on Miss Bertha."

"Or on Mrs. Halkett either. Do you know she told Bertha you and she were engaged to be married?"

"Zounds, you don't say so! That accounts for the girl's manner to me, then, and for her coming by an earlier train. A pretty scrape you have got me into, Paul, by your folly with that woman. I fully expect her to bring an action for breach of promise against me before I am rid of her," said Sir Peter, fuming and walking up and down the cell.

"She can't; she has not a scrap of evidence. I'll swear I never breathed such a thing as marriage to her."

"I wish I knew what you did say to her."

"Never mind what I said. You go and take the bull by the horns; ask her what she means by daring to say she is engaged to you; that will bring her to her senses, perhaps."

"I'll find out exactly what she said to Bertha first. I suppose they are going back by the express."

"No, they have gone by the parliamentary expressly to avoid you, I imagine. By the way, what sort of a fellow is young Malcolmson, Peter?"

"Very good-looking, tall and fair. I believe he was struck with Miss Chloe; he has been to me this morning to ask if I'll take him to call on them."

"I hope you refused."

"I could not very well do that; I gave him a hint there was not much hope for him in that quarter, and of course I might as well have warned a moth to avoid a candle. He is bent on singeing his wings, poor boy. But how are you feeling?"

Here the conversation became professional, and Sir Peter was very much dissatisfied with his brother's condition, and felt morally certain he would break down before long.

"Let's see, you have two or three weeks more of this, haven't you?"

"Till Tuesday fortnight; I have two more Fridays."

"I can't come again before this day fortnight, I am afraid. Get Crofton to come over next week and see you for me; I'll write to him myself, I think; and keep up your spirits as well as you can," said Sir Peter, who shortly after took leave of the

prisoner, feeling very much worried about him, as well as about Bertha and Mrs. Halkett.

He decided to call on Bertha the next day and have an explanation ; he would have gone that evening, only he feared she might decline to receive him ; to his annoyance when he called the following afternoon, the servant said Miss Bertha was not at home, and Miss Chloe was out, making a distinction and a difference which Bertha had not intended her to make. Sir Peter was furious, not so much with Bertha as with Mrs. Halkett, though Bertha was sufficiently provoking, for he was too busy to have much time to spare for morning calls ; moreover, if she persisted in refusing to see him, how was he to explain matters ?

He decided to press Chloe into his service ; she was a young woman of resources, perhaps she would obtain him an interview, so he wrote her a little note that evening, telling her he was anxious to see Bertha, and asking her when he was most likely to find her at home. He sent it by hand, and ordered the messenger to wait for an answer.

† The man was kept waiting half-an-hour, and finally returned with the following note :

“DEAR SIR PETER,

“Bertha is as obstinate as a mule. I have pleaded, I have stormed, I have wept, I have even knelt to her, and nothing I can say or do will induce her to see you or even to read a letter if you write to her. It is all that dreadful woman’s doing : why did you ask her to meet us ? This scene with Bertha has affected my heart ; I feel I am going to be very ill to-morrow morning about ten o’clock. I shall send for you, and you must come and see me—and Bertha.

“Yours sincerely,

“CHLOE.”

This epistle raised Chloe very high in Sir Peter’s opinion ; she was certainly a clever little thing, and if only her ruse succeeded in procuring him an interview with Bertha he would be her friend for life.

The next morning Chloe did not get up to breakfast, but sent word to Bertha she was ill. Bertha hurried upstairs to know what was the matter, and was so visibly concerned that Chloe could hardly keep her countenance.

"It is all my heart, Bertha ; I have never had anything of the kind before ; I think you had better send for a doctor."

"Yes, dear ; whom shall I send for ?" said Bertha, who knew Chloe was nervous about her heart, because Sir John Dane had suffered from heart disease.

"Sir Peter Dursley ; I would rather have him than a stranger. Send at once, please, dear ; and, Bertha, you'll see him first, and tell him about me, won't you ?"

"Yes, dear, certainly ; any private feelings of course must give way to illness," said Bertha, falling into the trap as easily as Chloe had expected she would.

It never occurred to the sober Bertha that Chloe was shamming ; she took it all *au grand sérieux*, and allowed neither her genuine anxiety about her sister, nor the objection to see Sir Peter, which was not genuine, to interfere with her appetite for breakfast. When breakfast was over and a message came to say Sir Peter would call almost immediately, Bertha braced herself to meet him, and determined the interview should be of the briefest and most formal description. She would be as cold and precise as Augusta, and would take care that the conversation referred solely and entirely to Chloe's illness.

Just as she had arranged this in her own mind a hansom drew up at the door, Sir Peter sprang out, ran up the steps and knocked at the door in a violent hurry, and the next minute Bertha found herself *tête-à-tête* with him, while Chloe jumped out of bed, locked her bedroom door and proceeded to dress, chuckling mightily the while.

CHAPTER XXII.

BERTHA IS CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

"GOOD-MORNING, Sir Peter. My sister is ill and wishes to see you ; she is very nervous about her heart ; I trust it is nothing very serious," said Bertha, rising as Sir Peter entered, and not offering him a seat, in order to make the meeting as short as possible.

"I hope not ; I think not, but before we go upstairs I should like a few minutes' conversation with you."

"Yes, will you sit down ?" said Bertha reluctantly, imagining the conversation was to be about Chloe.

"What did Mrs. Halkett say to you the other evening about me?" said Sir Peter abruptly.

Bertha was startled by the suddenness of the question and by the manner in which it was asked, which said plainer than words he intended to have an answer.

"She said you were going to be married."

"Did she say to whom?"

"Not in so many words, but she meant to herself, for she added, 'We have not announced it yet.'"

"And you believed her?" said Sir Peter sternly.

"Of course I believed her," faltered Bertha.

"Then I presume you consider me one of the biggest scamps God ever made."

"I did not think a woman would dare to say such a thing unless it were true," said Bertha, feeling very small.

"My dear girl, women of Mrs. Halkett's calibre will say anything to attain their object. I hope I am not guilty of conceit in saying Mrs. Halkett has done me the honour to wish to marry me, but I can assure you no power on earth would persuade me to accept that honour. The fact is, during that week that Paul was personating me he flirted with her, and though he assures me he said nothing that could possibly be construed into an offer of marriage, still she has presumed upon what he did say to imagine I have some serious intentions towards her. She is a very dangerous woman, and what fiend possessed Paul to involve me in such an entanglement I can't imagine, but I give you my word of honour never by word or look have I given Mrs. Halkett the slightest cause to imagine I regarded her as anything beyond a mere acquaintance. Any interest I have shown in her has been purely professional, for she is a patient of mine, she is one of the last women on the face of the earth of whom I should ever make a friend."

"She is very wicked, then, for she told me you were one of her most intimate friends," said Bertha.

"Confound her impertinence. You did not believe her, I hope?"

"Yes, I did—till now."

Sir Peter rose and walked up and down the room once or twice, then he drew a chair close to Bertha's, and sitting down by her side took one of her hands in both of his, she being too happy and too frightened to resist.

"Bertha, I have something to say to you ; I came on purpose to say it," he began.

"But there is Chloe ; we have forgotten her," said Bertha.

"No, I have not. She will take no harm for a few minutes. I have had trouble enough to get an audience from your ladyship, thanks to Mrs. Halkett ; now I have succeeded I mean to make the most of it. Bertha, I want a wife, and I have recently decided that I might search the whole world before I found a woman who would make so sweet, so loving, so amiable a wife as she whose hand I now hold in mine. May I keep it?"

Bertha did not answer, but her hand remained in his.

He drew her to him, put his arm round her, and kissed her cheek.

"Bertha, I will do my best to make you happy. Will you try to love me?"

Bertha looked at him and whispered :

"There is no need to try," and then ashamed of the implied confession she hid her face in his waistcoat, but Sir Peter lifted it up in both his hands, looked into her eyes and kissed her again, on the lips this time.

And Bertha wondered what heaven would be like if this were earth.

At this moment the drawing-room door was opened after a preliminary shaking of the handle, and Chloe, dressed for going out, with her violin-case in her hand, appeared.

"Chloe !" exclaimed Bertha, who, flushed with joy and the light of love playing over her face, looked almost beautiful as she started to her feet, one of her hands still in Sir Peter's clasp.

"Yes, it is Chloe. Sir Peter, your impatient patient has recovered without your advice. Wasn't it clever of me?"

"It was ; I am deeply grateful to you."

"So you ought to be. The fibs I have told on your behalf ; may they be counted unto me as righteousness," said Chloe.

"Chloe, I don't believe you were ill after all !" exclaimed Bertha.

"You would have no doubts on that score if you had seen the breakfast I have eaten, while Sir Peter has been wasting his morning with you."

'It is the best morning's work I ever did ; I have won a wife.

Will you congratulate me, Chloe?" said Sir Peter, putting an arm round Bertha.

"Yes, I am delighted. I shall be a very very nice sister-in-law. I daresay you thought of that when you proposed to Bertha," said Chloe.

"You vain little puss, you never entered my mind."

"Not though I was supposed to be dying of heart disease upstairs? Bertha, you dear glad old thing, thank your Chloe for being so thoughtful as to sham illness for your sake. Bless you, my dears, bless you both. I am glad there are two happy people in the world this fine morning. I am now going for a violin lesson. Sir Peter, go to your patients. Bertha, go and brush your hair," and giving Bertha a hug and blowing Sir Peter a kiss Chloe vanished.

She ran upstairs again a minute later, really to see what the lovers were doing, ostensibly to ask what they thought Augusta and Constance would say to the news.

"I declare I'll telegraph it to them," she said to herself as she waited on the door-step for a cab, and before Sir Peter got home the news of his engagement had reached Eastfolk.

Constance was in the garden sowing annuals when the telegraph boy arrived. She took the envelope and carried it to Augusta.

"Here is a telegram, Augusta. Open it quick, dear; it is sure to be good news this nice bright morning."

"Telegrams more often contain bad news than good," said Augusta, opening the envelope, reading the message, and sinking back speechless in her chair.

"What is it?" said Constance, a trifle disconcerted as she picked up the telegram, but the next moment her cheerfulness reassumed its customary sway.

"Why, it is splendid news. Bertha engaged to Sir Peter Dursley. What a good match for her in every way. I felt sure it must be good news directly I saw the boy. Aren't you glad, Augusta?"

"Very," said Augusta in a tone of most bitter disappointment, which happily for her the sprightly Constance did not observe.

"I am so glad. Who would have thought of Bertha marrying the first of us all? Quiet, good, gentle Bertha. She'll make a very good step-mother to his children. I daresay he thought of

that. Well, that was the silver lining to the cloud of father's death. I wonder if Chloe has discerned the finger of Providence in that trial now. All we wanted was patience, the silver was sure to break through."

"For mercy's sake hold your tongue, Constance; your excitement is positively immodest, and as for your optimism it is a perfect mania," exclaimed Augusta angrily.

This sudden bouleversement of her private little plan for winning Sir Peter herself was sufficiently trying without the addition of Constance's crowing over it.

"My dear Augusta, what can be the matter? You seem irritated instead of cheered by this good news; perhaps this delicious spring weather I revel in tries you. I think you had better take some iron. That will pick you up and give you an appetite for enjoying life."

Augusta dare not trust herself to say any more; she yearned to shake Constance; so she rose and took refuge in her own room till luncheon, when Constance proposed they should drive over to Lyneham and tell Miss Dursley the news.

"The two families seem destined to be united so we must be civil to Miss Dursley. I used to think Mr. Dursley would be our brother-in-law, till father's death changed Chloe as it has done," said Constance.

"I suppose Chloe is engaged to him, if not her conduct in coming down from London to visit him in prison is most unmaidenly even in these latter days, when propriety is outraged openly by every modern woman—young or old. I ought never to have allowed Bertha and Chloe to go alone to London. I did so against my better judgment, but I thought Bertha was to be trusted, whereas she appears to be as giddy as Chloe."

"My dear Augusta, you really are rather severe on Bertha. I should never describe her as giddy; I think she just hits the happy medium, she is quiet without being prudish, and I am delighted at her happiness. Will you go and see Miss Dursley to-day?"

"Yes, a drive will do me good; I have a headache," said Augusta, who, in the privacy of her own room, had resolved to bear her disappointment in as dignified a manner as possible.

They found Dorothy at home entertaining a party of children, Sir Peter's little ones and the rector's little girls, all of whom

were having tea in the garden for the first time that year. Dr. Crofton was gone out for the day, and Miss Dursley had seized the opportunity of his absence to give the children a treat, which she was enjoying as much as any of them, and was rather vexed at having to leave the garden to go indoors, and give tea to those dreadfully stiff Miss Danes.

The news of Sir Peter's engagement to Bertha was a tremendous surprise to her; she could not disguise her astonishment, but she was genuinely pleased, for she liked Bertha and thought she would make an excellent wife and step-mother.

"Dr. Crofton heard from Peter this morning and he has been in a very mysterious mood ever since. I wonder if Peter told him of his engagement," said Dorothy.

"I hardly think there was time. Chloe telegraphed to us; I imagine it is only just arranged," said Constance.

"Then I am afraid Paul must be ill, for Dr. Crofton looked very grave over Peter's letter, and he has gone out for the day; where, no one knows. He hired a trap from the 'Crown' and merely sent word to me he should not be home till dinner-time. I am afraid Peter has sent him over to Eastwich to see Paul," said Miss Dursley, who had been very much exercised all day about Dr. Crofton's movements.

"You must not conclude he is ill; look on the bright side and hope it is only some professional matter that has taken Dr. Crofton to Eastwich, if indeed he has gone there," said Constance.

"I feel sure he has, and I am equally sure he won't tell me if my suspicions are right," said Dorothy.

"But I should ask him, if I were you; it is such a pity to be fearing an evil which perhaps does not exist," said Constance.

"I probably shall ask him, but he won't tell me unless he chooses to do so. I never dare ask him a question about any of the patients, though knowing so much about them as I do, I of course feel interested."

"Surely, considering the subordinate position Dr. Crofton is in, you can demand an answer to any question you see fit to ask," said Miss Dane.

Dorothy trilled out one of her pretty laughs.

"Indeed you don't know Dr. Crofton, then. I assure you it is I who am in the subordinate position, and made to keep in it, too,

and feel it, not he. It is as much as my life is worth, or at any rate my peace of mind, to venture a remark on professional matters, and even on other subjects I have to exercise a wise discretion, he is so reserved and so sensitive," said Miss Dursley, who delighted in talking about Dr. Crofton, and forgot her anxiety about Paul and her excitement about Sir Peter's engagement while discussing him.

"Yes, but as the mistress of the house, I think you should assert yourself and not allow a mere assistant to presume to dictate what is right or wrong to you," said Augusta.

Dorothy flushed and answered rather sharply :

"Dr. Crofton is a *locum tenens*, not an assistant. He has come here with the idea of buying the practice ; besides, I consider he is quite right not to allow any interference with his professional duties, even though I may not like it."

"Of course you know best ; still I should insist upon an answer on this subject when he comes back to-day," said Augusta.

"I think I shall," said Dorothy, as her visitors rose to leave.

Now Dr. Crofton had gone by Sir Peter's request to see Mr. Dursley. He found him very unwell, and he returned feeling anxious about him, and determined, if possible, to keep the fact of his illness from Dorothy. Sir Peter had asked him to do this and Paul had urged him most strongly not to tell Dorothy he was ill as she would fret and worry about it. Therefore when Miss Dursley went to the surgery, an act in itself a crime, on his return, and asked him point-blank where he had been, Dr. Crofton was very much put out.

"I have been out on professional business," he answered.

"I ask because I am afraid Paul is ill, and that you have been to see him. Am I right ?" said Dorothy.

"You have no right to ask me any questions about my patients and I decline to answer," said Dr. Crofton angrily.

"Then you are exceedingly rude and very unkind also. I asked you a civil, reasonable question, to which I have every right to expect an answer," said Miss Dursley.

"I have answered."

"You have not, you have refused to answer, and until you do answer, and moreover apologize for your rudeness, I shall not speak to you," said Dorothy, remembering that he had told her

to say this if he lost his temper with her, but not feeling sure that the present was the sort of occasion he had anticipated when he made the request.

He laughed a little short cynical laugh.

"It is I who ought to demand an apology, I think, not you."

"I wish you may get one," said Dorothy, laughing, and as she returned to the drawing-room, the sound of her pretty laughter echoed down the passage.

"Confound her laugh," muttered Crofton as he banged the surgery door and became aware of the fact that they had quarrelled now in real earnest.

(To be continued.)

On Music Halls.

IN discussing a subject so essentially modern as the music halls one is faced at the outset with a difficulty which on the first glance appears to be serious. This difficulty is their very newness itself. In the first place they have so recently come into general observation that it is doubtful if the subject is one that will appeal to a sufficiently large portion of the public to make it worth discussion at all. This alone would a few years ago have been an insuperable obstacle, but this has, to a certain extent, been removed by the unmistakable wave of popularity among all classes with which they have of late been favoured. In the second place they are so modern that they have little or no past; and the task of criticising the present without having the benefit of bygone experiences with which to compare those of to-day renders the work, if not certainly impossible, at any rate more arduous. To sit down to contemplate the absolutely frivolous with solemnity is always difficult, and it is far from the intention of the writer to attempt anything so foolish; but the subject is one that has lately been given so much attention that he hopes he may be so fortunate as to find readers who have enough time to waste upon it, to whom it may prove entertaining.

Nothing can exist totally without a purpose, and though it may in this case be rather hard to discover at first, still it must eventually become evident to the persevering. The purpose of the music hall is to afford amusement without trouble and, if possible, without instruction. When the theatre begins to preach and propound problems, we have to seek a more placid form of entertainment elsewhere. When we are tired with our day's work or day's play, as the case may be, we don't want to be worried with subjects which few of us are capable of understanding, and which still fewer have any wish to contemplate. It is then we look for amusement in these more easy-going haunts, where we can enjoy our tobacco in peace, while we are afforded an entertainment which, if it does not startle us with the brilliancy of its wit, does not at any rate bore us with

theories which are either as old as Adam or as nonsensical as they are new-fangled. If we are made to laugh, so much the better, but we don't expect it, or if there are any who do, they must often be sadly disappointed. All we want is a certain amount of change and gaiety combined with a comfortable seat and plenty of leg room, and in these particulars it must be admitted we are on the whole fairly well served.

Music halls, in a more or less defined shape, have been in existence ever since the beginning of the present century, but it is only within the last very few years that they have attained anything like an established position. To a certain extent akin to the theatre, the music hall is at the same time, though perhaps in a less degree, related to the public house, from which indeed it originally sprung. It is this low origin, perhaps, that for so long a time rendered it a subject unfit for the ears of Mrs. Grundy. For a lady to go to a music hall, even with a strong body-guard of the opposite sex and a thick veil, was, until quite recently, considered a daring, if not an outrageous, thing to do. But we have changed all that. As the halls became more affluent, so did our chaste-minded matron unbend; and to adjourn to a music hall after dinner is now as common as to go on to the play. The cause of this sudden revulsion of opinion is rather hard to discern, but it would be equally difficult to trace her reasons for having withheld her patronage for so long. No doubt this wish to pry into unknown haunts was primarily, to a great extent, prompted by a desire of being shocked, but there was little or nothing to shock her. Still, however, though she no longer holds up her hands in pious horror at the bare mention of the Alhambra, as she did in the seventies, a certain fiction as to their wickedness is kept up that is sufficient to add to their fascinations. Whether the fact of her giving them the warmth of her smiles will result in the ultimate benefit of either party it is rather early days to say; her having done so, however, renders the subject of the music halls one that is duly recognized by a large portion of the public, and makes this article possible. It is hardly necessary to state that the aforesaid wickedness does not really exist outside the imaginations of those to whom it seems attractive. Vulgarity, it is true, there is, but it is not of a more blatant description than that of the burlesque theatres, and is, as a rule, more amusing. To be capable of enjoying a music hall does not require any

vast amount of intellectual capacity—perhaps indeed you are better without it—but to enable one's self to appreciate correctly its merits and demerits entails, if not actual study, at any rate, constant application. To a casual visitor the performance may often seem a trifle tame and uninteresting, when to the *habitué* it would appear quite the opposite. To the former the effusions of Mr. Dacre or Mr. Le Brunn would sound nothing less than hopeless jingles accompanied by still more hopeless words, and the happiest efforts of Dan Leno or Marie Lloyd but the grimacings and antics of candidates for Colney Hatch. In fact you must get thoroughly used to them before you can be capable of enjoying them to the full.

But let us return to our first obstacle—the non-existence of any real past in the music hall. The thing as we know it to-day is a purely modern invention, though perhaps the assertion that it is entirely without a history was a trifle too sweeping. We could no doubt find many people who would be only too ready to furnish us with details of what they would be quite correct in describing as the music halls of former days, but even if they did so, the old article differs so entirely and absolutely from the new that it would serve no good purpose to resuscitate it. There are always people who are glad to grumble at any state of things, and it is possible that we might find some who would be glad to return to the manners and customs of "The Cave of Harmony," to which Colonel Newcome took Clive, and who would prefer the bare boards and "The Body Snatcher" to the modern comforts and popular melodies of the West End music halls. If there are any such let them journey eastwards; they would not have far to go, and very little difficulty in finding the sawdusted floor, and flagons of porter as well; and though "The Body Snatcher" (if it ever existed outside the imagination of Thackeray) has long since been consigned to respectable oblivion, no doubt some equally lugubrious melody could be furnished. These public-house "free and easys," from which the more modern form of entertainment originally came, still exist, but what benefit the human race would derive from their being reintroduced for the purpose of supplanting what has taken their place it is difficult to see. Doubtless there was a certain artless charm about the old pot-house style of entertainment, but it was not such as would appeal to an audience of to-day. The

simplicity of the naked boards and the pewter pot may be all very well figuratively speaking, but we have grown out of it, and want something more elaborate. The majority of the public prefer thick carpets to sawdust, and the demand for porter is not what it was. As it at present stands, the music hall is essentially a lounge where amusement can be found and enjoyed with the least possible trouble. We don't want to be edified or wildly excited, but to be able to sit peacefully, and have something to see and hear that is just sufficiently interesting or amusing to prevent our going to sleep without at the same time taxing our intellects too heavily. Could this state of things be as easily attained when seated on the hard bench or unpadded chair of your "Cave of Harmony," or whatever it chose to call itself, as in its more gorgeous offspring? Certainly not. Let us then be contented with our present lot, and cease all murmurs against the powers that be.

Of course there has been an intervening period between these two exceedingly opposite forms of this peculiar style of entertainment. There were the more recent days when the *lion comique* roared forth from his den songs which attained huge popularity with the masses, but as he no longer exists and has no living prototype, there is no good in wasting our time on him. The names of Vance and Leybourne are still remembered by the old frequenter of the music halls, but the outside world has completely forgotten them. Their songs are practically dead, and though most of us who have got beyond our salad days can remember "We don't want to fight," and perhaps a few of us "Champagne Charley," we venture to think that it would be difficult for the majority to name their respective singers. Mr. Macdermott, once known as "the great," who sang the former, is, we believe, still alive, but for the general public he might as well never have existed. Unlike the popular actor, the music hall artist scarcely lives in men's memories, and even his portrait is no longer to be found except on that most degraded of objects, the torn and faded cover of a comic song that has had its day. This state of things will not continue, as the illustrated periodicals with which the country is at present flooded, have for some time past given much space and attention to the performers of the halls; and the next generation will, if it has time, have ample opportunity of surveying the features and reading the somewhat apocryphal histories with

which the interviewers have endowed the artists of to-day. Their names, too, are more widely known and their different styles more readily appreciated than they would have been say twenty, or even ten years ago.

An institution that formerly constituted one of the most important, if not the most important feature of every music hall, and has only of very late years been abolished, was the chairman, and one cannot help looking back upon him with feelings of regret, though, of course, as far as the West End of the town was concerned, he was practically no longer of any use. The method at present adopted of announcing the name of the artist by means of a programme and numbers on either side of the stage is, it cannot be denied, much more effectual than were the tones of his voice, however stentorian they might be. One cannot, however, help missing him; his expanse of white shirt front and flashing diamond ring gave such an air to the entertainment, of which until his final abolition he always seemed to be the presiding genius. To the last he appeared a connecting link between the stage and the audience. One kept up somehow in one's mind a pleasing fiction that the singers as well as the listeners trembled at his nod, and thought him magnanimous when he graciously allowed Mr. or Miss So-and-So to oblige again. He survives, however, only in very few places, notably at the Middlesex Music Hall, in Drury Lane, and as he has gone it only remains for us to say, good luck go with him, for, unless I am much mistaken, we shall never see him more. His shirt has gone to the wash for the last time; his diamond ring sheds its radiance on a grateful audience no longer.

Among the many sweeping alterations that have of late been the order of the day, it was hardly to be expected that the character of the entertainment generally, and the songs in particular, should be passed by without an attempt being made to alter them also. This, however, has happily so far proved entirely unsuccessful. There has, it is true, been a good deal of outcry as to the inanity of the songs themselves, and the jingling method of their melodies, but it has had, as yet, no perceptible result in the alteration of their general tone. The people who advocate the introduction of ballads and glees into an ordinary variety programme entirely misunderstand the meaning of the class of entertainment that is required. We want to be amused

merely, not enraptured or carried away by a combination of sweet sounds. If our risible faculties are not affected by the words of the song or the method of the artist, our ear should be tickled by the liveliness of the tune. To enable us to enjoy good music it must be performed by artists of the first rank and listened to in silence, and without the accompaniment of chinking glasses, drawing corks, striking matches, and general conversation. If you do away with all these what benefit is to be gained from going to a music hall at all? You will find better entertainment at a Richter concert, or at a Wagner night at the Queen's Hall. Old English ballads have always a certain amount of popularity with the million, and are, on that account, a permissible introduction into a variety programme, where they sometimes furnish an effective contrast to the other items. To please the multitude the minority must suffer, and though "Comin' thro' the Rye" or "Sally in our Alley" may cause one positive torture, the outburst of enthusiasm with which they are invariably greeted is in some sense a recompense for one's sufferings. Songs of a religious nature are, however, absolutely out of place, and only show extremely bad taste in the singer who tries to make capital out of them, and the management which permits their performance.

It is not, however, so much the song as the individuality of the singer that is the main thing in the successes of the music halls. Given to a bad artist, the best song ever written will never gain applause, while, on the other hand, a clever performer can work a comparatively indifferent one in such a manner that it spreads like wildfire over the entire English-speaking world. Look, for instance, at the extraordinary "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay"—for in a discussion of this sort even the unmentionable must be referred to—would this song, which was, it is said, performed in England at a period four years before it became the rage, have ever been what it was without the assistance of Miss Lottie Collins? The idea was, to an extent, original, and the words of the verses rather humorous, but the refrain, chorus, or whatever it was, was absolute drivel. And yet this same chorus was the very thing that, when once treated by a capable artist, ran madly not only over England and America, but more or less over the whole civilized globe. Miss Collins gave the song with such vivacity that we never paused to think whether it was nonsense or not, and accompanied it with such clever antics—if we may be pardoned for calling

them so—that the audience, figuratively speaking, rose in a body and greeted it with storms of applause. This instance is chosen merely as the most highly illustrative of the absolutely nonsensical being elevated to the rank of wide popularity by the merits of the performer alone; a hundred others could be given, but it would be waste of time and space to furnish such a catalogue.

One curious fact about the music halls is how extremely limited is the number of really leading artists, when one considers the large number of people who have chosen to adopt the profession of comic singers as a means of earning their bread. We often hear of people who are rapidly coming to the front, and who are about to set the Thames on fire, but few of them pass the boundary of respectable utility, and the majority sink back into the obscurity from whence they came without even attaining that level. The inroad made on the music halls by the members of the theatrical profession was, we were told, to make an alteration in the character of the performances which would be highly beneficial to them. About three years ago the actors, seeing the enormous salaries that were being gained by their second cousins of the halls, whom until then they had entirely refused to recognize, suddenly took it into their heads to leave the theatres for the variety stage in shoals. We were then promised a new state of things altogether. Our beloved music hall was to be elevated by their means to a height never dreamed of by its legitimate artists. Has this been done? Thank heaven, no. It is true that there has been a partially successful attempt made in some of the leading halls of the West End to reduce the performance to the level of a penny reading or the German Reeds' entertainment; but the public have steadily remained true to their old favourites, and the genuine music hall artist is still the only one who meets with any real success in his own sphere. None of the imported artists have ever attained the rank of a star with the exception of Mr. Chevalier, and his success was so short and ephemeral that he would be more fitly described as a meteor, and not a very surprising one at that. But we will deal with him presently. Of the others some, it is true, have remained in their new calling, but these are in the minority, and have none of them reached such a level as to call for special mention.

The stars proper of the music hall stage may, as a matter of fact, almost be counted on one's fingers. The reason of this

arises from various causes, the principal one, doubtless, being, in this as in every other profession, the limited number of people who have the requisite knowledge of what the public require of them, combined with the faculty of knowing how to meet their requirements. When he has once established his popularity the great ease with which an artist can perform at several different places in the same evening renders it comparatively easy for him to keep it up with several audiences, often of very different classes, at the same time, thus rendering the task of supplanting him more difficult. Among the stars, those who occupy the front rank are Miss Marie Lloyd, Miss Lottie Collins, Miss Bessie Bellwood, Miss Fanny Leslie (who, though she at one time favoured the theatres, originally came from the halls), Miss Vesta Tilley, Mr. Dan Leno, Mr. Knowles, Mr. Eugene Stratton, the gentleman calling himself Little Tich, Mr. Chirgwin and Mr. Harry Randall. Of course there are several others who may fairly claim to be stars of the first magnitude, in the shape of acrobats, jugglers and the like, but as it is not intended to deal with their performances here, their names need not be given *seriatim*.

Before going into the merits of the performers we must give a glance at the entertainment generally. A properly arranged music hall programme should set out an infinite variety of material for the delectation of the audience. In the arrangement of the turns the greatest care has to be exercised, so that two performers of a similar calibre shall not follow one another too closely, and produce by so doing the monotony and comparisons which must inevitably ensue. Of course, the style of the performance varies according to the reputation, position, or even the size of the house. At the larger halls, such as the Alhambra and Empire, where the ballet finds a home, the comic singer, unless phenomenally popular at the moment, gets but scant encouragement, while the obvious impossibility of putting anything of a spectacular nature on the tiny stage of the London Pavilion, for instance, forces it to rely almost entirely on the efforts of single performers, with the occasional help of a troupe of acrobats or dancers. But though there are certain limits prescribed either by the tastes of the audience at each place of entertainment, or by its size and locality, still the astute manager is ever on the outlook for any form of novelty with which to tickle the taste of his

patrons. There is underlying the rest-loving nature of the habitual frequenter of the music halls a strong desire to be surprised, if possible, and with as little trouble as possible. If a proprietor is fortunate enough to secure anything that will meet this desirable end, he is pretty certain of an assured success. His patrons, however, like their novelty without having its newness thrust upon them with too much braying of brass and sounding of cymbals. If a thing is over-advertised it more often than not fails from this very reason. An ordinary loungee would always rather be unexpectedly roused from his state of torpid and peaceful enjoyment, than have his hopes worked up by the glowing wording of the programme to be only too frequently dashed to atoms in the realization. Strangely enough it is in this very matter of furnishing a varied, and to an extent, a novel programme that the managers most often break down. Though the public remain loyal to their old favourites, as long as they continue to work conscientiously and well, the infusion of fresh talent must always be beneficial, and in giving the younger artists a chance of distinguishing themselves the manager is doing no harm, either to himself or the star performers, as the music halls are not overstocked with people of genius. One has, as a rule, to endure a great deal that is more or less indifferent in every programme, no matter where it is, either through favouritism or the terrible idea that seems to possess so many managers, that if he has one or two special attractions the rest of the performance can look after itself. The long engagements and censorship as to type of song that have been the rule at certain places of late years have, it is to be feared, proved highly detrimental to many young artists, who, in their eager desire to perform in the West End of London, have allowed themselves to be bound by hard and fast rules, which have entirely prevented their chances of getting on, even if they had it in them to do so.

When a particular hall has attained a reputation for a certain staple of attraction, it is rather apt to rely on that alone and not to back it up with others, if not of equal merit, at any rate such as prevent the audience being bored while waiting for the *bonne bouche* of the evening. Another grave fault which has of late been particularly noticeable is the terrible tendency of every house to imitate its next-door neighbour, so that in the event of a performance meeting with success in one place it has been

copied *ad-nauseam* all over London. The serpentine dance and the *tableaux vivants* were two particularly bad instances of this monkey-like want of originality, which has, we think, had an effect on the money-making as well as the artistic side of the question the reverse of beneficial. If we have seen a particular thing at a performance one night, much as it may please us at the time, we are not as a rule so carried away by it as to make us wish to see it again the next night, or perhaps even the next week, but lately it has been frequent to find that in addition to precisely the same programme being provided at three of the leading London music halls at the same time, the others are only too often content to rely on what is merely a slight variation of almost exactly the same form of entertainment. It may be very amusing for the Empire, Alhambra, or Palace to try to out-do its rivals in the matter of living pictures or strong men, but the public do not enter into it in the same spirit, and get tired of the constant repetition of one thing in different places, not infrequently preferring that which they saw first to its more gorgeous and costly successors, simply from the fact that it was the first.

Each music hall has to a certain extent its individual audience, though this is not so much the case in the west as in more eastern regions. To gauge the wants of his patrons is the manager's task, and it is no easy one, no audience being more easily bored and driven away, and when once lost, more difficult to retrieve. In the more distant parts of the town where there is less competition perhaps less is required, but even there it is no easy task to retain their wayward good graces; what then must it be in the more fashionable quarters, where a dozen doors are ready to receive the deserter? A programme that would be tolerated or even appreciated at the Tivoli, would, if transplanted even to one of the humbler temples of the east, be voted "no class," while many a performance and performer who would be greeted by the poorer dwellers of the town with yells of enthusiastic delight, would fail to raise even a smile from a more aristocratic audience. One thing that is as a rule painfully evident in the frequenter of the more expensive music hall is his slavish bowing down before the reputation of a performer. It is not uncommon to find distinctly good work passed coldly by merely because the name of the singer is not well known,

extremely indifferent work from an artist of repute being at the same time greeted with acclamation. This want of discrimination is less perceptible in poorer quarters, for though the name of an artist must necessarily bear some weight with the audience, he has to mind his P's and Q's or he will speedily lose any prestige it may give him. The majority of performers, however, appreciate this fully, and work with equal zeal to get and retain the good opinion of all classes. How well their efforts are rewarded is shown by the amount of popularity they enjoy, as well as the enormous salaries they earn.

The music hall singers proper may, broadly speaking, be divided into four classes: comic singers, character singers, descriptive singers and grotesque singers—the ballad singer, being hardly sufficiently established as a necessary feature, and being merely an offshoot of the concert platform, need not be included. Each class keeps very much within its own bounds, and though a few people may do a little in every line, they are the exception and do not often meet with any great success out of their particular sphere. The first class, namely, the comic singers, have to depend more on their own exertions and the merits of their songs than either of the others, as they have, as a rule, no accessories with which to help their efforts. The lady "serio-comic" has a much harder task to raise a laugh than the genuine grotesque. More often than not, the latter will procure roars of laughter by his appearance alone, and it is comparatively easy to the accomplished performer to keep his audience in a state of merriment when once they are fairly started. But the singers of comic songs pure and simple, if one may be excused for calling them so, have no such helps. They have to make all their effects by expression, gesture and inflection of the voice, being attired as a rule in evening dress with the occasional addition of a squash hat and an overcoat; but, clothes and all, they have to make their audience laugh, and what is more, they do it. If it is uphill work for a man, what must it be for a woman? She can't even make faces, and her hat and feathers, however elaborate, can hardly be considered as aids to her performance. The curious thing is that, in spite of this, out of the five ladies already mentioned as leading lights in the music hall firmament, only one is a character singer, the remaining four contenting themselves

with this meaningless style of dress, three of them wearing feminine and one masculine attire, the latter being as to fit and neatness a lesson which it is to be regretted her brother artists don't follow.

It is, however, the performers themselves and not their clothes we have to consider. To be a music hall singer it is not necessary to possess much voice or appearance, nor is it even essential that you should have a knowledge of dancing, but if you have a little of each so much the better. What the audiences want, for the most part, is that the singing should be distinct and in tune, the appearance comic or effective as the case may require, and the dancing be neatly executed if not elaborate. Indeed, in the matter of dancing, at the halls as well as the theatres, very little seems to give satisfaction, though it must be admitted that the so-called dances with which we have been nauseated of late, which take the form of a more or less hideous series of contortions, appear to have found less favour in the halls than elsewhere. The type of terpsichorean effort which as a rule finds most favour is of the cellar-flap order and, especially in the east, is watched with keen interest and often applauded to the echo.

Though the methods of different performers vary to no small extent, as has already been said, the distinct branches of the profession are not very numerous. In every programme we are sure to meet with several variations of the same thing, the burden of raising the performance from a level of uniform monotony resting mainly on the shoulders of the artist. We have always the serio-comic lady vocalist with her flaxen locks and abbreviated "*costume de bal*;" the juggler or acrobat in his spangled tights; the costermonger, sprinkled liberally with pearl buttons; the scarecrow of an eccentric comedian or patter singer in the eternal frock coat that is miles too large for him, and the battered top hat; the singer of bacchanalian or descriptive songs with his invariably ill-fitting dress suit and yellow overcoat; the male impersonator in her better cut ditto; the ink-black negro and striped singer of what are known as coon songs; the pantomime prince, rendered so gorgeous in the persons of Miss Harriet Vernon or Miss Maggie Duggan; and sometimes the Cockney slattern in her crushed bonnet and tattered shawl. When you have enumerated these,

you find yourself at the end of your tether and have to begin over again. Among them all, the two species first named are the ones most frequently to be met with. The lady called for some unknown reason "serio-comic," is sure to be encountered two or three times in an evening in any music hall where the entertainment is made up mainly of singers, and even at the larger establishments where ballet or spectacle holds sway, she usually makes her appearance once in the course of the performance. She is a thing quite by herself and has no prototype on the theatrical stage. As a rule she speaks her song, the tune being meanwhile played softly by the orchestra, and she not infrequently dances a few steps of a nondescript character between the verses.

As has been said, to the ranks of the "serio-comic" belong three out of the five ladies enumerated as stars. Of these none has attained her present position with such rapidity or filled it with such *clat* as the brightest of the band; I refer of course to Marie Lloyd. This talented artist, though she has, we believe, been on the stage actually less than ten years, has been so long without a rival that her name is known all over the world. Gifted with a keen sense of humour combined with a seemingly inexhaustible flow of good spirits, she holds a place in the affections of the public that no other artist in the music halls has ever attained. This is no doubt due not only to her great cleverness but also to the extreme care with which she carries out everything she attempts. Wherever she may be appearing her entrance is greeted with a roar of applause. The songs she is singing may not, it is true, always appeal equally to people of different classes, but Marie Lloyd herself invariably does, and generally her songs are so well chosen as to be adapted to the understanding of any audience. Though as a rule a singer of comic songs of the ordinary type, her occasional excursions into the realms of character singing are so successful as to make one wish for more. In her song, "My First," the sketch of a coster woman brimming over with delight in her newly-arrived son and heir, she was so natural as to be almost pathetic in spite of the broadly comic lines on which the song itself was written. Then again as the aggravating little girl who went to "Johnny Jones" for information on various subjects, every gesture and intonation was that of a consummate artist,

while in the more recent damsel whose experiences at the "Threepenny 'Op" are so amusingly related, every movement of the London factory girl is copied to the life with only just sufficient exaggeration to make the performance ludicrous. She does not spare her appearance, she is too good an artist for that, and every detail of the work girl's best clothes, from the long gold earrings to the elastic-sided boots, is faithfully carried out. It is not with such songs as these, however, but rather with those of the type of "Then you wink the other eye" and "I wiggy Vous" that Marie Lloyd made her name. She has a faculty for getting every ounce of meaning out of whatever she has to sing, being able to set her hearers in a roar with a well-placed sniff or a twinkle of her expressive eye, and though she has not a large voice can make it carry in any building. In addition to this she has a style, which she might justly claim to be solely her own, if she did not share it with three talented younger sisters, all of whom are rapidly making themselves exceedingly popular.

We cannot, however, spend all our time in eulogy of a single performer as there are many others who claim attention. Miss Lottie Collins' style differs so entirely from that of the lady of whom we have just been speaking that there is no fear of the discussion of its merits giving rise to comparisons which are odious. Her method is rather that of giving her audience a succession of surprises which resemble more than anything else a series of electric shocks. She takes the public into her confidence almost in a whisper and then, just as she has begun to convince them that, in spite of her rather *outré* garments and befeathered hat, she is the primmest of the prim, whack! bang! off she goes into a frenzied dance, which she invests with enough energy for ten ordinary mortals, and which resembles more than anything else the gyrations of a sky-rocket. The Crystal Palace on Brock's benefit night is not in it with Miss Collins. She whirls and kicks with the rapidity of lightning until, just as you think she must kill herself, she stops, smiling, and to all appearance as cool as a cucumber, bows her acknowledgments to her invariably enthusiastic audience and withdraws. She does not, however, rely on her activity alone as a means of making her songs go, being possessed of a distinctly comic manner and a finished style. Indeed one of the songs in which

she excels, "The Little Widow," calls for no display of acrobatics, but every line is given with the expression and point of a true comedian, and proves that Lottie Collins is an artist not merely to the ends of her toes, but also to the tips of her fingers.

The number of male performers of ability is far greater than that of the females, for though the actual stars are few, there is a large contingent of performers of the second rank whose cleverness is of no mean order. The loosely-clothed scarecrow abounds everywhere, and his efforts must be of a truly feeble description if they are not rewarded with a certain measure of applause. This is no doubt to an extent owing to his comic appearance, but the real *habitud* of the music hall requires something more than his red nose and tattered garments to rouse him from his lethargy, and the applause he gets is not due to this alone. There is, however, a strong family resemblance between these gentlemen ; they all have boots too large for them, with which at intervals they flap the boards in order to give point to their witticisms ; they invariably break into conversation of a garrulous description between the verse and chorus of their song, and the subjects they choose are, also invariably, their domestic troubles or the unheard-of misfortunes which they have a faculty for meeting and which they delight in retailing to their auditors. Some of them, in fact, devote their attention almost wholly to conversational patter and the telling of anecdotes of a more or less amusing kind, as for instance Mr. Knowles, but these can hardly be classed among the grotesques proper.

Among the latter, and indeed among all the male singers of the halls, Dan Leno wins hands down. To look at Leno is to laugh ; the more grievous his imaginary experiences may be so much the more do his hearers delight in them. He is the king of the grotesques. Gifted by nature with a comic though somewhat lugubrious face, with the aid of art he makes himself appear as ludicrous as it is in the power of mortal man to do. He has little or no voice to speak of, but that makes no difference to him ; but he is always audible, and it is not the songs but Leno delivering them that we go to hear. The only serious rival he possesses, in his own line, is Little Tich, and the latter, relying as he does for his comic effects to such a great extent on the peculiarity, his size, can hardly be compared with him. Both

are irresistibly funny, but to Leno must be yielded the palm, whether he laughs or cries, and it may be said, by the way, that his laughter is the more pitiable of the two, it must be a mind utterly devoid of humour to which his antics fail to appeal. In all probability if you asked half the audience ten minutes after he had left the stage what it was he had been singing about they could not tell you, but they can always afford you the information that it was very funny. It must not, however, be imagined that Little Tich is not also possessed of a sense of humour; he is distinctly, and if he has never quite attained the pre-eminence of Leno, he has approached it very nearly, and like him enjoys huge popularity. As may be imagined there is a mighty following of the manner of these popular artists, and from among their imitators have arisen several clever performers, some of whom have struck out a line in a measure their own. Among these should be mentioned Messrs. Robey, Dunville and Leamore, though it is impossible in a paper of this description to go into their various claims to public favour at greater length.

So much attention has been given by artists to the two styles of performance we have discussed, that character singing of a genuine kind has been rather neglected. The costermonger has, it is true, had a fair innings, and the claims of the dilapidated female have found an advocate in the incomparable Bessie Bellwood, of whom we shall have the pleasure of speaking presently, but otherwise the field has been left almost entirely untouched. It has often seemed a pity that some artists have not devoted more attention to this branch of their profession, which might surely be made very effective.

The leadership of the noble army of the costers would no doubt be claimed by most people for Mr. Albert Chevalier, and seeing that it was he who first brought the cult into prominence it is to a certain extent his due. The impersonation of the costermonger was, however, well established in the music halls long before Mr. Chevalier left the stage of the theatre, on which he had been scarcely triumphant, for that of the music hall, upon which he blossomed into such an enormous though apparently short-lived success. His performances, successful as they were with the general public, were never wholly satisfactory to the more captious portion of it, as they never in the slightest degree resembled the class he purported to portray. It seems unfair to

reproach a man with his nationality, but one cannot help thinking that the amount of Gallic blood in Mr. Chevalier's veins was to a great extent responsible for the extremely un-British style with which he represented a character essentially English. The coster may have an admiration for pearl buttons and a weakness for adorning his hat with a paper feather on bank holidays, but he is not a squeaky-voiced *scaramouche*. Mr. Gus Elen, who has also gained success in a similar line of business, is more like what he pretends to be, though his performance is marred by a disagreeable method of delivery and a sulky manner which are not characteristic. By far the most artistic rendering of the type that has yet been given is that of Mr. Alec Hurley, a young man who is rapidly gaining the public ear. Indeed he and Miss Kate Carney, whose delightful song with a donkey and barrow of fresh flowers was so deservedly popular, are the only performers whose efforts in this direction have been wholly satisfactory.

Miss Jenny Hill, whose enforced retirement is to be regretted and Miss Bessie Bellwood have devoted themselves mainly to a rather different type of female from the pure coster. The latter, the character singer *par excellence* of the halls, is a lady whose great talent is backed by an amount of impudence that is, even for a Cockney, nothing less than astounding. Her ready wit never fails to stand her in good stead, and no matter what topic she may light upon her comments are always amusing and to the point. No one who has ever heard her engage in wordy warfare with her audience (a reprehensible custom to which this fair artist is unhappily too much addicted) has ever heard her come off anything but victorious. Though drawn as a rule from the same source, namely, the slattern of the London slums, each of her studies has a distinct individuality. The lady who reads the penny novelette until she imagines herself in love with Aubrey Plantagenet, its hero, is quite a different personage from the forlorn individual who makes such plaintive inquiries for her Mary Anne, or the dilapidated female who, like many of us, has seen better days. The performances of the ex-actress Miss Fanny Leslie differ again entirely in style, and are marked by great finish and a thorough knowledge of how to hold the attention of her audience and keep them amused without any apparent effort on the part of the singer. As we have said, Miss Leslie belongs

to the serio-comic order of vocalists. Another lady, too little heard in London of late, is Miss Vesta Tilley, neatest of feminine boys, who cannot be passed wholly without comment, though space will not permit of an adequate eulogy of her art.

We must touch on yet a few more well-known figures of the variety stage before our task can be deemed complete. The music hall nigger and the singer of plantation songs are merely offshoots of the old-fashioned Christy Minstrel entertainments; in fact, Eugene Stratton, the pioneer of the band, was himself for many years connected with the troupe that has for such a long time occupied the St. James's Hall. His performance is, however, so far ahead of any of his companions of the black cork fraternity that he must not be confused with them in any way. As well as being a quaint singer he is an almost perfect dancer, having all the ease and neatness which can only be the result of careful training combined with an originality that it would be hard to equal. Mr. Chirgwin, known as the "White-eyed Kaffir," is also an exceedingly clever and humorous artist who performs with dexterity on many instruments. It is not possible, however, to discuss here the merits and demerits of each individual performer, the writer having already overstepped the bounds of his original intention in this direction. The double turns, male and female, have of late been conspicuous by their absence from the more prosperous halls. The once popular Two Macs have ceased to delight us with their barbarous horseplay, and their followers, whose name was at one time legion, seem to have disappeared since the deaths of their clever masters. The two Macnaughtens are the last of the band, and share the honours of being the only double turn of any importance with the Poluskis and those matchless clowns the Brothers Griffiths. The last-named pair, who deserve to be canonised, if for the merits of their Blondin Donkey alone, are a couple whose drolleries never pall, and who, though they have to a great extent worked the same business ever since they first became popular, never fail to raise hearty laughter.

The music hall sisters with their open-work stockings and huge sun bonnets, who were once such a popular item in every performance, appear to have become quite a thing of the past. Though no artists of this kind, with the exception perhaps of the Sisters Leamar, have ever attained a very prominent

position, still their performance created further variety in a form of entertainment where change is essential. Their inane duets (which would more properly be described as double solos, as the singers never took parts) with their drivelling lines about the moonbeams and the wood birds, nearly always accompanied by the clicking of brass heels, had a cheerfulness about them which it seems a pity to have entirely dispensed with.

Of the sketches, acrobats, pantomimists, jugglers and various other attractions which form such important parts of a well-arranged bill, we can say nothing. Enough and to spare has already been written, and the reader, if there is any one sufficiently enterprising to wade as far as this, must be getting heartily sick of the subject. After all, it is not a matter of vast importance to the human race whether this or that form of entertainment, as the case may be, provided by the music hall caterer is the most attractive. That the halls themselves have a great hold on public favour is sufficiently evidenced by the crowds that fill them and the dividends they pay, and it would be invidious to make comparisons. They afford a great deal of pleasure of an uninstrusive kind to a large section of the community, who would otherwise be boring themselves and one another by attempting to take part in amusements of a more intellectual nature, and in addition furnish a mild form of entertainment sufficient to distract the thoughts of the worker from his daily toils without at the same time overtaxing his brain. For this last let us be thankful to them.

GUY T. LITTLE.

The Sins of the Fathers.

SHE did not interest me in the least at first. I had rejoiced over my discovery of the little hamlet where I was staying, a tiny old-world village, straggling irregularly up a Kentish hill-side, unchanged for a hundred years past, unknown to the summer visitor. I meant to be undisturbed. A great idea had seized me and I needed quiet in which to work it out. Finding this impossible in London, I fled from the noise and rush of the season, leaving no address. As a novelist I was already more than a little successful, but now I was intent upon a book which should make my name immortal.

For a week my work prospered. No one called, my solitude was unbroken. Then one day, Mrs. Kilpin, my extremely communicative landlady, informed me that a young lady and gentleman had taken rooms in the cottage next door and were going to stay some time. I was annoyed. I felt unsociable. I did not wish for the society of any young lady and gentleman. I determined to ignore them resolutely. I met the girl that very morning and looked the other way carefully. For two or three days I succeeded in maintaining an attitude of calm indifference. Then the presence of my neighbours began to irritate me. It was the girl I particularly objected to, her brother was a mere nonentity, a shadow of his sister. But she was cyclonic. To begin with, I was always meeting her. I ran up against her half-a-dozen times a day, going out at the gate. If I went for a walk in the woods I was sure to see her, walking with big strides, her three terriers leaping and rushing round her. If I went along the road she would come tearing down the hill, driving her high dog-cart and fast trotting cob. She was always in bounding health and spirits, she wore straight, severely-cut garments, shirts and ties, straw hats with colours, like a man. She was very tall and erect and not very slender, a type I had always detested. She wore her hair drawn back from her forehead and coiled flat at the back of her head, no soft curls and puffs like other girls. She had a cheerful, ringing voice, and always carried a walking stick. Her brother was a delicate-

looking boy of about twenty, who evidently leant on his sister and depended on her for everything. Their natural positions seemed quite reversed.

I hate mannish women. Even the near neighbourhood of one had a bad effect on my nerves. She was so noisy and energetic, for ever coming in and out, calling to her brother, or playing with her barking, yelping dogs.

I bore it as best I could. Then one morning that girl took to playing the piano. For the first ten minutes I did not mind. Then she made some awful discords, stopped and went back over the passage again with the same mistakes. She began again. I got up and shut the window. The irritating sounds were still audible. At the end of half-an-hour I flung down my pen in a state of wild exasperation and marched into the next garden. All the doors were open and I walked in unceremoniously. The girl was still pounding at that unfortunate instrument.

"I am sorry to disturb you," I said, "but I really must request that when you are practising you will keep the windows closed. I am engaged on an important piece of work and the noise is most annoying."

I was in a very bad temper. I am musical and the sounds she had been extracting were excruciating to any one of a nervous temperament. I thought she would probably assert her right to play as much and as badly as she liked.

It was what I should have expected of her.

To my surprise she blushed. Masculine women do not blush as a rule.

"Oh, I am so sorry to have worried you," she said. "I know I don't play well, but my brother is so fond of music, and I thought I might manage to learn some of his accompaniments. He finds the evenings long, poor boy; but I will be careful to shut the windows in future."

Her unexpectedly pacific reply irritated me more than ever. I felt discomfited and put in the wrong.

"I shall be extremely obliged to you," I said shortly and went back to my writing.

But my train of thought had been interrupted, my ideas refused to flow. I found myself thinking about the girl next door instead of the predicament in which I had just landed my heroine.

I am a good judge of character, and I hate to be mistaken in my estimate of man or woman. I had decided that my neighbour was loud, masculine and aggressive. My very short interview with her had upset that theory.

She had been apologetic and humble when addressed by a total stranger in a manner which it suddenly occurred to me that she might justly have resented. In a room her voice was singularly sweet and pleasant, and far from being aggressive she had seemed shy.

All possibility of work was over for me for that day. I was angry with myself now and I went off for a long tramp in the woods to work off my vexation at my own boorishness. In the road I met the boy and my heart smote me as I noticed his pale face and languid movements. He found the evenings so long. I mentally styled myself an unsociable, selfish brute, and began to lay plans for cultivating friendly relations with him, though, as far as his sister was concerned, I had certainly not made a happy beginning. For the next two days, however, I never once met Miss Heron, as Mrs. Kilpin informed me was the young lady's name.

She was evidently avoiding me, for I caught her once actually turning back into the house, in order not to meet me.

This was unpleasant, the more so that I was forced to confess that the snub was not undeserved.

I was by this time well forward with my work, the great stress and strain which accompanies the birth of an idea was over, and I was once more fit for intercourse with my kind. I was even beginning to find my own society, though exclusive, a trifle dull. On the third day I was out in the fields, some way from home, when getting over a stile I felt a stab of pain in the region of the ankle.

Well I knew what it foreboded, another few steps and down I went, giving my foot an ugly wrench as I fell.

I sat cursing my ill-luck and casting about for some means of getting back to the village.

I was not far from the high road and I managed to crawl the short distance. There was nothing for it but to wait till some one came along. It was very hot and the pain in my foot was intense.

I was thankful when at the end of half-an-hour I heard wheels

in the distance. Then, to my horror, round the corner dashed Miss Heron in her dog-cart, driving as usual at the rate of twelve miles an hour. She seemed to guess there was something wrong, for when she saw me she pulled the cob almost on to its haunches.

"What's the matter? Had an accident?" she called in her loudest, most ringing tones.

"I've given my foot a twist," I replied. "I can't walk. Would you mind letting them know in the village? Tell them to send something to fetch me."

She was out of the cart and at my side like a flash.

"Let me see," she said. She took hold of my foot in a business-like, capable way.

"Why, it's dreadfully swollen already! You should have taken off your boot at once. We shall have to cut it now. Lend me your knife."

I produced it meekly.

She ripped up the laces and leather in the deftest way, and I sighed with relief.

"Now you're coming back with me at once," she said with authority.

"I beg your pardon," said I. "I can't possibly get into that high cart."

"You can if I help you."

"But you are not strong enough."

"Am I not?" she said with a smile. "Just try."

I got to my feet, or rather to my foot, and hopped towards the cart. The cob was a restive, fidgety animal.

"Quiet, Jenny," said Miss Heron. "I'll just hitch her to this tree so that she shan't move while you're getting in. Now, put your sound foot on the step."

I did so and next minute I found myself safely landed. She had lifted me from behind as well and more gently than a man could have done it. She came round to the other side, smiling and a little flushed, to take her place by me on the lofty driving-seat.

"This will shake you much less than any of the springless conveyances from the village," she said, gathering the reins in her rather large, well-shaped hands.

"I'm giving you a lot of trouble, I'm afraid," I said, feeling the lameness of the remark.

"Now, how disappointing you are," she said, looking down at me quizzically. "From the originality of your behaviour when first I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance I should never have expected you to say anything so conventional."

I seized my opportunity.

"I owe you an apology," I said. "I was abominably rude, but the fact is I am always unfit for society when I am writing. I was not getting on and I was out of temper at my own stupidity, so I vented my ill-humour on you. I beg your pardon. I have been wanting to apologize ever since."

"You *were* rude," she said honestly. "But I saw you weren't quite responsible for your actions. We'll forgive and forget, shall we?"

She held out her hand for me to shake, just like a good-natured schoolboy.

"I hope you'll leave off avoiding me now," I said laughing.

"You noticed that?"

She blushed in the way that betrayed her sex so delightfully.

"I felt awfully shy after such a snub. By the way, do you know my name?"

"If your landlady is half as talkative as mine you must know that and a great deal more besides about *me*."

A shadow of swift vexation passed over her face.

"How people gossip in the country!" she exclaimed impatiently. "I don't know *your* name, anyway. Mrs. Kilpin is very mysterious about you. She says you are 'one of them writing gentlemen from London.'"

I laughed.

"My name is Maxwell—Philip Maxwell."

"What!" she cried. "Maxwell! Are you *the* Maxwell, the new author every one is talking about?"

"That is not for me to say. But I believe there is only one author of that name, and I am he."

"I am very pleased to meet you," she said heartily. "I admire your books extremely, and I would sacrifice a good deal more than my bad practising to the pleasure of reading a new one."

"Please don't speak of that," I said. "I hope you will allow me to come in and play your brother's accompaniments for him sometimes. I know a little of the art."

"That would be very kind of you," she answered. "Poor

Bernard is very delicate, and he gets low and depressed if the weather is bad and he has to stay indoors. I should be so glad if you could cheer him up a little."

Her boyish manner slipped from her as soon as her feelings were touched. As she spoke of her brother an anxious, almost maternal expression came into her eyes.

"I'll do my best," I said gently, wondering at the change in her.

She seemed to fall into a sort of reverie, and did not speak again until we drew up before my gate.

Then she was all energy, helped me carefully from the dog-cart, got me into my sitting-room and wanted to go for the doctor.

But I assured her it was not necessary. The same thing had happened to me once or twice before, and I knew that a week's rest, with cold bandages, would set me right.

So she left me, giving many directions to Mrs. Kilpin, and promising that her brother should come in later to see how I was getting on.

The next few days, to my deep disgust, I was obliged to spend in bed. Bernard Heron came to sit with me several times. He was rather an uninteresting youth, evidently in very bad health, and I found it hard to make conversation with him.

The one subject on which he became enthusiastic was his sister. At the bare mention of her name his whole manner changed, his face lit up, his eyes brightened.

"Ah, Nora!" he exclaimed. "No one knows what Nora is, Mr. Maxwell. She is the one thing which makes my miserable life worth living."

He seemed to regard her as something between a mother and a guardian angel. He would talk of her by the hour, telling me long stories of her prowess in the hunting-field, how she was a better shot with a rifle than most men, and yet the best of sick nurses, the most sympathetic of sisters.

I let him talk. Nora Heron's character interested and puzzled me. I felt I had not got to the bottom of it. I did not know the mainsprings of her life.

'My foot improved slowly, and one morning, to my great relief, I was able with Mrs. Kilpin's help to hobble into my sitting-room. I was trying to do a little work when a quick, firm step sounded on the gravel.

Some one rapped at the door.

"Come in," I cried.

There was a rush of joyful dogs, and Miss Heron came in like a breeze, fresh and cheerful as ever.

"How are you this morning?" she asked. "I heard you were down, so I thought I would come in and inquire. Down, Nettle! Down, Chappie! I hope you don't mind them. They are so glad to get out, dear things."

She sat down, one terrier on her lap, the other two on the skirts of her gown. She looked the very incarnation of health and vitality.

"*Diane Chasserese*," I said, looking at her with a smile.

"A very modern Diana, in tailor-made clothes and a sailor hat," she laughed. "How goes the book?"

"Getting on well," I answered, with a glance at the sheets of foolscap. "The worst is over now."

"When will it be published? I'm longing to read it."

"Not for another two months, I'm afraid." Then, yielding to a sudden unaccountable impulse, I said, "Would you care to hear the first few chapters?"

She flushed brightly.

"Oh, Mr. Maxwell! That *would* be lovely. Are you sure you don't mind?"

"On the contrary, it will be a great pleasure."

She settled herself to listen; I to read.

I never had a more sympathetic audience. Her attention never flagged; she kept her eyes fixed on me with a look of keen, critical appreciation. When I stopped she drew a long breath.

"That is splendid!" she said heartily. "I can't tell you how much I like it. It is much better than anything you have done before. There is something in it which your other books lack—something more human, more sympathetic—I can't exactly put it into words, but you will see, it will be your greatest success."

I felt that her approval was worth having. She had such a strong, earnest way of speaking, her words carried conviction and encouragement.

I realized that though she lacked some feminine charm, she was certainly above and beyond all ordinary feminine weaknesses.

Utterly truthful, utterly honest, was Nora Heron, frank and free and noble in heart and soul.

She went away, making me promise to come and see them as soon as I was able.

The very next evening I found my way to their door, with the aid of a stick and the arm of my landlady's husband.

Miss Heron was alone, surrounded by her dogs as usual. She dropped the book she had in her hand as I came in, and looked up with a smile.

"You've found your feet again, I see," she said. "Come in and sit down. I was just wanting some one to talk to."

"You are in very good company," I said, taking up the volume she had let fall. "So you read Kant. I should hardly have expected that of you."

"Why not?" she asked sharply.

"I thought your tastes lay more in the direction of out-door amusements and interests."

"Is it impossible to combine the two?" she asked. "I suppose you thought the *Sportsman* would be more in my line, or Hawley Smart. But I like anything which keeps my brain employed. I always read Kant when I am inclined to think about myself."

"Are you such an unpleasant subject for meditation?" I said laughingly.

"You don't know!" For an instant there settled in her eyes a look of the most intense sadness. Then it was gone, and she began to talk. She led me on to speak of myself, of my successes, my ambitions, my work.

She had the critical faculties of a man and the sympathies of a woman. She was the most delightful companion and comrade I have ever met.

Bernard came in presently and dragged me to the piano. I was surprised to find that he played the violin exquisitely, and we were soon lost in a world of harmony.

Those evenings! I look back on them even now with a tightening of the heart-strings: I at the piano, Bernard drawing wonderful melody from his violin, and in the background Nora, lounging on the sofa, a restful look in her dark eyes.

It gave me a shock when I discovered that Miss Heron smoked. She took a cigarette as naturally as her brother when the box was produced. I suppose she read my disapproval in my face and it seemed to annoy her, for she fell straightway into her

most boyish mood and almost succeeded in making me feel a return of my first dislike to her.

She was an odd mixture. Sometimes for a whole day I would forget that I was not in the society of a clever young man, then some chance remark, some careless word, would bring out all the latent womanliness of her character.

I had driven with her one morning to a neighbouring village, where she wished to make some sketches. I sat by her, smoking and talking, while she painted.

A young woman had come out of a cottage near by with a baby in her arms and stood watching us.

"What a pretty picture!" I whispered to Miss Heron. "An ideal English mother and child! You want a figure in your sketch. Shall I go and ask the girl to stand still while you put her in?"

To my astonishment she seemed intensely irritated.

"Pray do nothing of the sort!" she exclaimed. "I detest children. I can't paint while that woman stands there. I shall go home."

And she actually shut up her paint-box and walked off to the dog-cart, leaving me to follow. I was astounded. She drove home without uttering a word, her lips tightly compressed, her eyes frowning. Her annoyance was so completely out of all proportion to its cause, that it seemed to me that something must underlie it. However, she vouchsafed no explanation.

I ventured one weak remark.

"I thought all women liked children," I said.

"I am not all women," she retorted abruptly, and fell once more into a heavy silence.

We separated at our respective gates without a word. When we met again she had apparently forgotten the incident, and greeted me with her usual light-heartedness. I did not forget it until something else happened which made me feel that there were no end to the contradictions of this strange girl's nature. I was sitting with her at the window of their sitting-room one afternoon, watching the passers-by in the village street. This street was a source of great amusement to us. Endless were the studies in character and human nature which we had made from the window.

A small, shrewish-looking girl came along the pavement

wheeling a perambulator in which was a baby. The child was crying in a feeble, irritating way, which seemed to annoy its nurse considerably.

Just as they came opposite us the child uttered a louder wail than usual. The girl shook it violently. "Be quiet, yer little varmint, will yer?" she exclaimed. Then with a vigorous slap, "I'll give yer something to cry for!"

Miss Heron started from her chair and rushed into the street. She seized the girl's arm.

"How dare you! How dare you ill-treat the child like that!" she cried. The girl cowered before the unexpected descent of a goddess from the car. I had never seen Miss Heron angry before. She was transformed; I hardly recognized her in this avenging angel with blazing eyes and quivering lips. She bent over the baby.

"Poor little thing!" she said, and her tone changed to one of the purest pity. "Look, Mr. Maxwell! No wonder it cried; one poor little leg was twisted right under it."

She took the child in her arms, soothing it and talking to it in the tenderest way.

Was this the girl who said she hated children? She was looking at this one as I remembered my mother looked at me, many long years ago.

The baby was quite quiet, it seemed to recognize a friend. It was a pretty child, and as Miss Heron held it in her arms, that new, tender, loving look in her eyes, I was suddenly reminded of one of Raphael's divinest pictures, the Sistine Madonna.

She caught my glance and, blushing vividly, busied herself with putting it back into its perambulator and arranging it comfortably.

"Now, if ever you dare to touch that child again I shall know it," she said to the little nurse, with a last dangerous flash of her eyes. "Remember I shall be watching you. I never forget any one."

I followed her silently into the house.

"How contradictory you are," I said. "Only the other day you told me you did not like children."

She did not answer. She gave me one look, then left the room without a word.

Her brother looked after her languidly. "Leave her alone,

Maxwell," he said. "She is in one of her moods to-day. She only wants to be by herself. She will go off to the woods now and come back this evening as jolly as ever."

This was exactly what happened. Miss Heron was more charming that night than she had ever been before. I stayed late, playing with Bernard, who was looking wonderfully better. I told his sister so as I said good-night.

"You really think so?" she said. "Thank God for that!"

She spoke with the most heart-felt thanksgiving in her tone. I felt almost angry with Bernard. What had he done to deserve such affectionate devotion? How is it that the best of women insist on throwing their love away on oftentimes the most unworthy objects?

That evening, had I but known it, was the last of our happy, undisturbed *camaraderie*.

The next day I was obliged to go up to town on business connected with the publication of my book, and did not return till late.

As I walked up the hill in the dusk, a dark figure stood at the Herons' gate. It was Nora. She did not see me until I got quite close to her. Then she started violently.

"Bernard!" she exclaimed, and as she recognized me. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Maxwell!"

Her accent changed to one of acute disappointment.

I was piqued. She knew the object of my journey to town, and I had been looking forward to her usual bright, sympathetic questionings. I had even been vain enough to fancy when I saw her that she might be watching for my return.

I stayed by her, making desultory remarks at intervals, to which she gave curt answers or none at all.

"Has your brother not come in yet?" I asked, at last.

She shot a suspicious glance at me.

"Not yet," she said shortly.

"Would you like me to go and look after him, if you are anxious?"

"Certainly not. I am not in the least anxious."

This was not encouraging. The church clock struck nine; it was quite dark.

"I should think your dinner must be waiting for you," said Miss Heron, breaking the silence of her own accord for the first time.

It was a pretty broad hint.

"Do you mean that you want to get rid of me?" I asked.

"I should be glad if you would go in," she answered.

I was deeply offended.

"Good-night, then," I said coldly.

She did not even hear me, she had already turned and was looking down the dark road again.

I went indoors, anger and jealousy raging within me. Was her heart so small that it would only harbour one affection? Her indifference was maddening. I had thought her my friend. I had spoken to her as I had spoken to no one else; I had laid bare my very soul to her. I resolved that she should not make a fool of me twice.

With the morning, however, things looked differently. I knew how over-anxious she was inclined to be where Bernard was concerned, and how she resented any appearance of interference between them. There might have been some excuse for her conduct.

I had bought a book for her in London, and with my peace-offering in my hand I went in next door. There was no one in the sitting-room. I rang the bell.

"Ask Miss Heron if I can see her," I said to the landlady.

She came back with the message:

"Mr. Bernard is not very well, and Miss Heron is sorry she cannot come down." I hardened my heart as I turned away.

Bernard could not be very ill, I thought, or they would have a doctor. She would not even spare five minutes to me it seemed.

Nevertheless, the next day I called again and sent up to know if there was anything I could do. This time the answer was:

"Miss Heron is much obliged, but she does not need any help."

That was the end, then. I was grievously disappointed. I suppose she was tired of me and had determined to get rid of me; or perhaps she was conscientiously afraid of my falling in love with her, and had chosen this means of damping any aspirations I might be supposed to entertain. She need not have feared, I would as soon have loved an icicle as one so narrow-hearted.

For the next three days I neither saw or heard anything of the Herons. I do not know why I stayed on in the place; my work was done, there was nothing to keep me, but I still lingered, though I was angry with myself for doing so.

On the fourth day as I turned into the main street I came full upon the brother and sister. Bernard looked very ill, that I could see. Miss Heron made an uncertain movement as if she meant to bow. I yielded to the fierce impulse of anger which rose up in my heart ; I turned my head away and cut her dead.

After that I felt it was time for me to be gone. I went home and made my preparations for leaving the next morning. About nine o'clock, all my arrangements finished, I left the house meaning to take a last stroll in the woods.

As I got to the bottom of the hill I heard some one staggering about and singing tipsily. It was very dark. Next moment a man lurched heavily into me ; something in his figure seemed familiar to me ; I seized him by the shoulder, and to my horror recognized Bernard Heron.

In an instant everything was clear to me. This was the secret that noble girl had guarded so jealously ; this was what she was expecting as she stood at the gate ; this was what she had determined to hide from me at any cost. I took the unfortunate boy by the arm :

"Come home with me," I said sternly ; "you have no business here."

My voice seemed to penetrate his muddled brains, for he offered no resistance and let me lead him back.

The dark figure was at the gate again as we neared it. Poor girl, how often she must have kept such miserable vigils.

"I have brought your brother home," I said to her.

She went into the house before us without a word. Bernard was nearly helpless by that time. I half-dragged, half-carried him in. I did not dare to look at Nora.

"I will take him upstairs and put him to bed."

She made a movement as if to follow.

"Don't come," I said ; "this isn't fit for you."

She obeyed me. She seemed absolutely stunned. I made Bernard as comfortable as possible, and put out the light. He fell into a drunken slumber almost at once. When I was sure he was asleep I came downstairs. The sitting-room door was ajar. I went in.

Nora was lying face downwards on the sofa as if utterly crushed. All her spirit had deserted her ; the very lines of her figure spoke of forlorn misery. She put out one hand as I came

to her side, blindly, appealingly, as if feeling in the dark. The pathetic, helpless gesture was so unlike her that I felt a great wave of tenderness sweep through my heart for her. I took her cold hand in my own warm one and held it in silent sympathy. In a few minutes she drew a long sigh and sat up.

"You know it now," she said; "I tried to prevent you, but it was no use."

"Why did you keep it from me?" I asked reproachfully; "you might have trusted me. I could have helped you all these days that I have been thinking you wanted to be rid of me."

"You thought *that*!" she exclaimed, "and I thought you stayed away because you—you—had found out, and were ashamed to know us any more."

"I came twice, but your messages were not very encouraging."

"I suppose not. You must forgive me, I was so miserable."

Forgive her! I could have kissed her feet!

"You must let me help you now," I said, taking her hand again.

"How kind you are!" she answered. "It will relieve me to tell you all about it, I think. We were orphans, left to the care of an uncle, who was our guardian. He was very good. I lived with him. Bernard was sent to a public school. We knew nothing of this terrible failing of his, until one day he suddenly returned home, expelled for drunkenness. It was a fearful shock to us. We kept him at home for a time, then he was sent to one private tutor's after another, never staying more than a few months anywhere. It was always the same story: they could not keep him. My uncle died a short time ago, and I determined to try and save Bernard by my influence. His love for me is the best point in his character. I brought him down to this quiet country place, hoping to keep him from evil associations. He went on so well until that day you went to town, and since then—oh, it has been terrible—he gets drunk; I don't know how. To-night I thought he was safely in bed; I was distracted when I found he had gone out."

The poor girl broke down and sobbed pitifully.

I consoled her as best I could, telling her that she could not hope to be successful all at once; that these cases were always subject to relapses, but that between us we could certainly save her brother.

I left her comparatively cheerful, making her promise to go to bed and to call me up if she needed help in the night. It was long before I slept myself, but I dropped off at last.

In the grey dawn I awoke with a start. Had I been dreaming or—Crack! a second pebble came through the open window on to the floor. I sprang from my bed, and put my head out cautiously.

In the garden beneath stood Nora Heron. She was barefooted, her long hair hanging down, a dressing-gown wrapped loosely round her.

"Mr. Maxwell," she whispered, "Bernard has gone mad! He came into my room with a knife threatening to kill himself! I managed to get it away from him and locked him in. For God's sake, come!"

I hurried on some clothes noiselessly, and was at her side in three minutes.

"Quick, quick!" she cried, hurrying before me into the next house.

"Where is he?" I asked as I followed her upstairs.

"In his own room. I persuaded him to go back to it. You can hear him; he is talking to himself. Oh, it is awful!"

I unlocked the door and went in. My first glance told me what was wrong. Bernard Heron was in the grip of an attack of *delirium tremens*. He lay huddled up on the bed muttering incoherently. He did not recognize either of us.

"We must have a doctor at once."

Nora shrank at my words.

"A doctor? There is none within five miles. And every one will know of his disgrace! Oh, I have tried so hard to save him!"

"No one else need know. I will call up your landlord and send him."

"No, no!" she cried, "I will take the dog-cart and go myself. It will be the quickest way, and nobody but I can drive the cob. Will you stay with him? Don't let any one come into the room."

"You may rely on me."

In an incredibly short time I heard the crash of wheels outside, and knew that she was off. I sat down by the bed to wait. Bernard was tolerably quiet at first, muttering to himself under his breath. Suddenly he sprang up with a terrific yell

"Spirits! Evil spirits all round me!" he shouted. "Don't you see them"—his voice dying away to a mysterious whisper—"in the corners; horrible, horrible things, all pointing and gibbering. They are coming—coming!" he shrieked. "They are dragging me down—down—to hell! Nora! save me!"

I had to hold him in his bed. The paroxysm passed, but in a few minutes he was up again, with always the same cry, calling madly on his sister to save him. In his intervals of quiet I strained my ears for the sounds of Nora's return. Never did time pass more slowly. To my intense relief, at the end of an hour, I heard the gallop of a horse, and the cart tore up, driven at a furious pace. The doctor looked very grave when he saw Bernard.

"It is not a bad attack," he said; "the worst is nearly over. But the boy looks as if he had no constitution. You had better get a nurse."

"Oh, no nurse! no nurse!" cried poor Nora. "Surely we two can manage between us. I have nursed him so often, and I am very strong."

"I quite understand your objection," the doctor said kindly. "We will see how we can manage. If he goes on well, perhaps there will be no need. I will call again later on."

He departed, giving many directions. I went to the gate with him.

"Do you think we shall pull him through?" I asked.

"Possibly through this attack. But not through another. A very sad case. At his age, too! Pardon me, but your wife is young for such work."

"Miss Heron is not my wife."

"Oh—ah—I beg your pardon. Still, in the future, no doubt. I congratulate you—. She is a splendid girl."

I did not contradict him. My wife? At least, no other woman should ever bear that name.

For the next two days Nora and I fought hand to hand with death for Bernard Heron's life.

During that time I never closed my eyes. Once I succeeded in persuading her to go and lie down, but she was back in an hour, declaring she could not sleep.

All through one night the doctor remained with us, battling with the terrible weakness which followed the delirium.

As the sun rose on the third day Bernard was saved.

Nora broke down then. I took her in my arms and let her sob on my shoulder. I think she had not the least idea who was holding her, she was so dazed with anxiety and fatigue.

I led her to her room and handed her over to the pitying landlady, a sympathetic, motherly woman, whom I could trust to take good care of her. After that all was plain sailing. Bernard gained strength more rapidly than we expected; at the end of a week he was well enough to sit up, and in a fortnight he was downstairs and out.

One lovely July evening I came in to find Nora alone in the sitting-room. She was doing nothing for a wonder, her hands lay idle in her lap. "How is he?" I asked, sitting down and patting Chappie, who came up and put his cold black nose into my hand.

"Resting in his room. He isn't quite himself again yet. I came down to write some letters, but I haven't done it."

"What were you thinking about just now?" I said.

"I was trying not to think at all. I was just letting all this beauty and peace sink into my heart."

I followed the dreamy gaze of her eyes.

It was indeed a beautiful and peaceful scene.

The sun was setting on the green uplands, bathing everything in its golden light. The great beeches and oaks cast long shadows on the grass, the pine-stems shone pink in the glow.

Something of the spirit of the evening seemed to be reflected from Nora's face. We sat for a few minutes in that comprehensive silence which is the surest sign of sympathy of soul.

Presently Nora's voice broke the spell. "I have been wondering what will be best to do," she said. "We can't stay here. I feel as if I should never be secure again. I ought to take Bernard away as soon as possible. I was thinking it might be a good thing to buy a yacht and go on a long cruise, right away from land. He would be safer at sea than anywhere else."

I felt a strange contraction at my heart. I had been letting myself drift, trying to forget that this delightful, intimate life with the woman I loved must have an end.

Her words seemed to bring that end terribly near. I could not answer. She waited a few minutes in some surprise. Then:

"Don't you approve of my idea?" she asked.

"I'm afraid I wasn't thinking of that. I was thinking of myself and of how I shall miss you," I answered slowly.

"Ah, how good you have been!" she exclaimed. "I haven't thanked you half enough. How can I ever repay you?"

I seized the opening.

"Give me the right to help you always," I said. "Give me yourself, my darling. I love you, Nora. Will you be my wife?"

She started to her feet. She had turned white to the lips.

"Your wife! Your wife! It's impossible!" She spoke in low tones of horror.

"Why impossible?" I asked gently. I had not expected her to be easily won.

"It's utterly, absolutely impossible. Bernard ——"

"I have thought of Bernard. You shall have the yacht if you like, my dearest. We will both take care of him together."

Her face changed for an instant, her voice softened.

"Do you really care for me as much as that?"

I took her hands and looked straight into her honest eyes.

"So much that unless I hear from your own lips that you do not and cannot love me in return, I will never give up the hope of making you my wife."

She turned her head from side to side, trying to avoid my gaze.

"Oh, I can't tell lies when you look at me like that!" she exclaimed at last, in the keenest distress.

"You do care!" I said joyfully. "You can't deny it! Then, by heaven, there is nothing that shall stand between us!"

She wrenched herself away from me.

"Oh, don't, don't! Will nothing satisfy you? I tell you it is impossible; hopelessly, completely impossible!"

"Say you do not love me."

"I can't! I can't!" She burst into tears. "God help me. I cannot say what is not true!"

"Nora," I said very gravely, "what is this great obstacle? You are not treating me fairly. You love me, and you say you will not marry me. Why not?"

She threw herself into her chair again and hid her face in her hands.

"What am I to do?" she moaned. "You leave me no choice. Oh, it is so hard for a woman to speak of these things!"

She rose to her feet and faced me, blushing scarlet.

"This is the reason, then," she said, speaking very slowly and distinctly; "Bernard is not the only one. My father died of drink, his father before him. It is hereditary in our family. God only knows what my poor mother suffered! She died of a broken heart. But before she died, she made me promise, she made me *swear*—that I would never marry, to bring into the world innocent children, doomed beforehand to this awful curse!"

I was silent. I was too much stunned for the moment to be able to speak.

"Now do you understand?" she cried, her words coming faster as her passion gathered. "I know you have often thought me unwomanly. My one aim has been to become so! I have tried to tear from my heart every womanly feeling, every womanly instinct. I have been different to other girls since I was almost a child. I always had this behind me. I knew I must not look to the future as I saw others doing. When I was at school I used to hear the girls talking of what they would do when they came out and were married. I would go away and hide rather than listen to them. I have never had a girl friend! I told you I hated children. I love them so that I cannot bear the sight of them. I have steeled myself to forget that I have a woman's heart at all. I thought I had done so. I didn't know it was possible to suffer as I am doing!"

She broke down utterly. I came to her side and took her hand.

"Nora, my darling, let us take the risks. Why should you pay the penalty of your father's sins?"

"They shall be visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation," she quoted drearily. "It's a hard law, but it is no use to kick against it."

"No one had any right to exact such a promise from you. Is my love to go for nothing? You are very possibly sacrificing yourself to a shadow. You are perfectly healthy, so am I. Let us take the risks."

"Don't touch me!" she cried, shrinking from me as I tried to take her in my arms. "Oh, Philip, help me to be brave! Don't tempt me to do what is wrong! If I married you we should never know a moment's happiness. Nothing can justify the breaking of a solemn oath. I knew what I was doing when I took it. I ought never to have allowed myself to love you. If I

had been more open with you at the first, you would never have thought of loving me. As it is, we must both suffer. Don't make it any harder. I will not, I cannot, turn coward now!"

I was overawed by her magnificent courage, her noble self-forgetfulness. I dared not say one other word to persuade her.

"Forgive me, Nora," I said; "you are too good for me. I love you; I shall always love you. You will henceforth be the only woman in the world to me. But I will go away. I would not cause you one instant's unnecessary pain. Some day, when we have fought our battle and conquered, I shall hope to see you again. Before I go, will you let me kiss you? only once, dearest; it is not much to ask."

It was a weak request. But how could I leave her so, loving her as I did? She did not answer for a minute. Then:

"Philip, I dare not," she said, "I cannot trust myself. Don't ask me, dear. You do not know me; I don't know myself to-night. I am afraid of myself. Please go away. I can't bear any more now, indeed I can't."

"Good-bye, then."

And so I left her in the darkness, for the sun had gone, not even touching her hand in farewell.

There was no rest for me that night. The atmosphere of the house stifled me. I could not stay indoors. I felt that violent physical exertion was imperative to relieve the mental agony I was suffering.

All through the long hours I paced the country lanes fighting against fate, against the terrible laws of heredity, which had brought such misery on myself and on the noble girl I loved. What had she done to deserve it? Why should hers be the life that was spoilt? I beat myself in vain, as better men have done before me, against the immutable decrees of destiny.

I never knew how far or whither I went that night. Towards sunrise I found myself near home, worn out body and soul. My window was open and easily accessible from the garden. I climbed in, and flinging myself on the bed in my clothes, slept the sleep of utter exhaustion.

It was late when I awoke. I busied myself with getting together my belongings. I felt I could not stay another day,

another hour, in the place. My preparations were nearly completed when Mrs. Kilpin brought me a tiny note :

"Come and see me before you go. Dr. Lane is going to take Bernard for a drive.—NORA."

For one instant an unexpressed hope arose in my heart. Next minute I felt that the bare thought dishonoured her.

The room was empty when I went in, but in a few minutes she came downstairs.

She gave me her hand ; it was as cold as ice. We neither of us spoke at first. Then I said :

"You wanted to see me?"

"I could not let you leave me as you did last night."

There was silence again.

"Philip, we are both most unhappy," she said. "We love each other, and we must never be anything more to each other than friends. But, since it is so, let us make the best of it. If we may only be friends, let our friendship be the most perfect, the most complete the world has ever seen ; not yet—not yet"—as I made a gesture of dissent—"but in a year's time, or even two. We will always love each other ; let it be as if we were very dear brothers. When first I knew you I often used to wish you were my brother. It all seems so hard and unjust now. But we are man and woman with our lives to live. We will not be beaten in the struggle ! We will not give up hope like miserable cowards ! Take your life and make the most of it as, God helping me, I will do with mine. Last night I wished to die. I was a coward. It is easy to die ; it is so hard to live ! We may rise 'on stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher things.' Let us try and rise, dear, on our dead love."

She spoke as if almost inspired, as one lifted above all earthly joys and griefs.

"God bless you, Nora !" I said reverently. "It is such women as you are that let a little of heaven's light into this dark world."

She gave me her hand ; I pressed my lips on it, as I would have kissed the hand of a saint.

"How ill you look !" she said presently with a sad smile.

"I have been walking about all night."

"Ah ! I only lay awake."

As she followed me to the door :

"I may write?" I asked.

"Oh, yes—but not too often."

Then for one moment her brave spirit failed her.

"Philip, how can I let you go!" she gasped, clinging to me passionately.

I was struggling with my own wild longing to take her in my arms, to kiss her sweet lips, to swear that neither heaven or earth should part us—

Down the street came the rush of a galloping horse ; the door was thrown violently open, and Dr. Lane almost fell into the room. He was very pale.

'Where is your brother? Has he come in?' he demanded breathlessly.

"Bernard? He was with you. He has not been back."

"I shall never forgive myself! I left him in the phaeton for five minutes, while I went to inquire after a patient. When I returned he and the carriage had disappeared. That was an hour ago. I got a horse and have been hunting for him ever since. It was easy to give me the slip in these lanes. I thought he might have come home."

"He has not been here. We have not seen him—— Hark! what is that?"

Something was coming down the road at a furious pace.

We all rushed out. To our horror, it was Bernard in the doctor's phaeton. He was evidently intoxicated, and had lost all control over the horses, who were galloping headlong down the hill. The heavy carriage rocked and swayed in an alarming way, as it swerved from one side of the road to the other.

"Good God! he will be killed!" cried Dr. Lane. "The sharp turn at the bottom—stop him, stop him!" he shouted to some labourers who stood on the side-walk.

They only stared stupidly.

The phaeton was abreast of us, thundering on its mad career.

I had hastily made up my mind to try and stop the horses at a spot further down, where the road was more level. I was too late.

Some one shot past me like a flash and sprang at their heads. It was Nora! I saw her for an instant dragged along, her feet off the ground, as she held with both hands to the reins.

Then there was a sickening crash, a scene of hideous confusion, the carriage overturned, the horses down, kicking wildly. It was a nightmare on which I cannot even now look back without shuddering!

We got her out from under the wreckage somehow and carried her back to the room she had left but five minutes before. Bernard was unhurt; he had fallen clear of the wheels and was soon safely locked into his own room.

"Is she much hurt?" I asked, as Dr. Lane bent over Nora.

"I don't know. I can't tell while you stay here. Go away and send me some woman who can keep her wits about her."

I went and found the landlady, then for half-an-hour I waited outside in mortal anxiety. The door opened and the doctor came out. One glance at his face and I knew I must prepare for the worst.

"What is it?"

"She is dying," he said in a shaking voice. "Internal injuries—twenty minutes at the outside, perhaps less—go in, she wants to see you. She will be able to speak to you now."

Nora lay on the sofa; already in the short time that had passed there was a great change in her. The shadow of death had fallen visibly upon her, her limbs, so short a time ago instinct with energy, lay helpless and inert, but the old indomitable courage still shone from her eyes. I knelt down beside her, hardly daring to touch her lest I should extinguish the faint lingering spark of life. She was looking at me in a yearning, appealing way, struggling to speak.

"Bernard——!" she gasped at last.

I understood.

"He is quite safe. You saved him, dearest. I will take care of him as far as it lies in my power. I will take your place with him."

An expression of deep relief passed over her face.

"Philip—kiss me—it can't—do any harm—*now*."

I pressed my lips to hers, cold and damp with pain. So we sealed our love, as the rush of the Death-Angel's wings darkened the air. The mists closed in upon her fast. She put up one hand, as if seeking my face in the darkness. One of her terriers had jumped on to the sofa and was whining and licking his mistress's feet. I held her hands tightly clasped in mine. There was a long silence, broken only by her quick, gasping breaths.

"Can you see me, my beloved?"

"Not now—but—I am not afraid."

They were her last words. As she had faced life, she faced death, and having passed through the valley of the shadow, her fearless soul took its flight into eternal day.

Poor Bernard's grief and remorse were terrible when he came to his senses and realized his loss. His own hold on life, always slight, slackened day by day. He seemed to have existed on his sister's superabundant energy, and without her he failed rapidly.

"It is by far the best way, Maxwell," he said to me one day. "I was doomed before ever I was born. I never had a chance in this world. They say God is merciful. Perhaps he will give me one in the next."

Who shall judge him? We, who only saw his failures, can never know what secret battles he may have fought and won. Nineteen centuries ago there lived upon this earth a Man, a great Teacher, who read the unfathomed depths of the human heart as none have read it before or since. He it was who uttered for the first time a supplication, familiar to us now through ages of daily use 'until the inwardness of it is almost lost on us: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

KATHARINE F. HILLS.

The Badjis' Curse.

By ETHEL F. HEDDLE.

FOUNDED ON FACT.

CHAPTER I.

I MADE the acquaintance of Herman van Homerie in Australia, and there he married his wife, who was English, and very pretty. I had got to know him very well, but we drifted apart when he went to Java and I to the States. There I rode the race for the land known as the "Cherokee Strip," the last reservation to be allotted by Uncle Sam and Uncle Sam's devoted countrymen—and there I had the worst run of luck possible, and managed to lose every penny I possessed. I won my land, but bad harvests and a dishonest partner destroyed all chance of success, and I was living in New York and picking up the barest of bare livelihoods, when a letter, which had followed me about for nigh a year, was put into my hands. It was from Van Homerie, and it offered me work with him on his coffee estate in Java, far up in the interior. I had been in Java before, in an office in Batavia, so I knew something of the people and their ways, and I jumped at the offer. I had promised my old father I would neither lend nor borrow, much as Laertes promised, but I thought I was justified in borrowing now as much as would pay my fare, for Van Homerie said if I would come I would find a month's *tractament* (salary) waiting for me at McMurdo's in Batavia, so I got the necessary dollars from an old friend, and off I started. The journey up country from Samarang took me two days, and I arrived at Poerobaymas late one Sunday evening. Van Homerie had told me nothing of his own affairs, and thus it came to pass that I did not know of his wife's death. He told me of it briefly and almost coldly, but I could see his hands twitch as we sat on the cool *pendoppo*, or verandah, a wide tree-bordered road before us, and a lizard chuckling somewhere behind the bamboo wall. His wife was dead, had died when the child was born, and the child was now six years old. That was literally all he ever said on the matter, but I saw that he was a changed man—embit-

tered, warped. It seemed as if he looked upon himself as the target of fate. Fate had dealt him this horrible blow, and henceforth nothing in the world mattered much, or was worth worrying over. And it seemed to have changed him in other ways, too; he was obstinate and suspicious—curiously obstinate. I noticed that the least opposition always fired his temper and made him resolved at all costs to do or say the thing objected to, though, of course, few ever dared to object to anything he said in this lonely place. I settled down to my work happily enough. After roughing it in the States, at Pond Creek, Oklahoma, and washing my own dishes and cooking my own pork, it seemed very luxurious to be waited on by natives who forestalled your every wish, and even watched to supply you with a ready match when your cigar went out. The work was not particularly heavy; I had a good horse and a boy of my own, and I boarded with Van Homerie in his big and thoroughly comfortable bungalow. His wife had made it very pretty before she died. There were traces of her presence everywhere. In the pictures on the walls—pretty water-colour sketches—in sundry photographs on easels, draped with Liberty silk—in the delicate china and silver—even in the flower glasses on the dinner table, which the boy always filled religiously with “gembang sepatu,” or the white waxy blossoms of the coffee tree. All this time I had not spoken of the child. I saw her the night after my arrival as I smoked in one of Van Homerie’s long cane chairs, with an old “Strand Magazine” before me, and one lizard chuckling monotonously behind the bamboo, while smaller and inferior ones chased each other and the flies gaily up and down the white-washed pillars.

“Boy,” I heard a child’s voice say in Malay, “bring me water and water the ferns.”

The next moment she walked up slowly and regarded me with solemn blue eyes. She was the most solemn child I ever saw, with fair hair cut quite short, like a boy’s, and the waxy white complexion of European children in the East. She wore a curious little frock of some loose white stuff, and there was a heavy bangle on either tiny arm. She regarded me curiously as I rose into a more respectful position and held out my hand. I am very fond of children, and most children take to me. This little one did. We were soon seated side by side, talking in Malay, for she knew no other language, and when her father

appeared he looked surprised. He stooped and kissed her fondly, and I saw his face relax. The next moment she ran off, and he sat down with a tired sigh and called the boy for something to drink.

"What is the child's name?" I asked. "She's an uncommonly pretty little thing. She must be a great comfort to you."

He was rolling a cigarette, his eyes bent.

"She is christened Mildred, after—her," he said; "but I don't call her that. Call her 'the child.' It is all the same to her."

And after that we always spoke of her, and addressed her, as "the child."

Stirring events were rare in Poerobaymus. Java is not so enterprising as an English colony, and we were up-country. The natives were quiet and contented, and life glided by very sleepily. We had the English mail once a week, and the Dutch once a week, and I had a good many English papers. I was teaching the child English, too, and she learned readily. Van Homerie looked up one evening, and said he would send her to school in England, by-and-bye, and he hoped to leave her well off. Coffee was paying well then, and he lived here for very little. The first edge of the black cloud came one day when he was home, unusually early, with a headache, and he seemed to have been going round his domain stirring up the boys, and making sundry alterations in the garden. He was going to send for more roses from Europe, he said, and cut down the pommeloe tree,* near the servants' quarters. He had bought a quantity of exquisite maiden-hair ferns, growing as we never see them grow in England, and these were grouped round the steps of the *pendoppo*. I remember how pretty it looked that evening, with Mrs. Van Homerie's tall lamp and pink shade behind the bamboo chair, and the orchids sending out long delicate trails of green from the china flower-pots hanging on the wall. A big photo of a huge wave breaking over a rocky coast stood on the easel, and the child was standing before it, her hands clasped, gazing intently—she had never seen the sea, of course.

"How is the headache?" I asked, sinking into a rocking-chair, and drawing the child up to my knee. "And what have you been about all the afternoon? Playing round, and waking up the boys?"

* A kind of large orange.

We used each our own language, and Van Homerie answered in Dutch, looking out at the road, which was quiet now, with only a slow grobak, drawn by the big, heavy-headed karbous (oxen), creaking by at intervals.

"Yes, I've been looking after things. I've kept the gardener pretty busy. And I've made up mind to do the garden up, and get some plants from Europe. And I've made up my mind on another thing. I'm going to cut down that confounded waringi tree at the gate. It darkens the garden, and one can hardly see to read after four o'clock in the *pendoppo*."

"The waringi tree?" and I stared aghast. "My dear fellow, you can't know what you are talking about. Would you have the whole place in a riot! It is the holy tree of Java—sacred, as sacred as Mohammed almost! You'd have all the hadjis (native priests) swarming about you like a hive of furious wasps!"

Rather to my surprise he frowned darkly.

"And do you really believe I mind the Javanese—ignorant, superstitious natives?"

"My dear boy, we *have* to mind them! We have to keep the iron hand well sheathed in velvet, even in India—I mean British India. We omitted to consider prejudice and caste once, and what was the consequence? The consequence was the Mutiny and the Black Hole of Calcutta!"

"I don't agree with you at all," Van Homerie said, doggedly. "You English think no one can colonize but your bull-dog selves. *We* treat the natives as children, and naughty children. You spoil them and of course they presume. I shall certainly cut down the waringi!"

I saw he was annoyed, and I said no more then. The child was listening with a curious wondering look, and after dinner she gave me her little hand and we wandered out to the garden to see the roses.

"What did you say about the waringi tree?"

I half laughed at that. Our English was advancing.

"The Tuan (master) wants to cut it down."

A strange look of surprise and fear chased itself over her face. I could feel the little fingers tighten on mine.

"No, no!" she said hastily, in Malay, "it is holy, sacred! It could not be! Never! never!"

"Well, I shall tell the Tuan so," I said, speaking lightly. "But now it is bed-time, childie."

She stood looking up into the long graceful branches of the magnificent tree. It was thirty feet round the trunk, the long branches, with their dark green leaves and curious grey streamers—like an old man's tangled beard—fell all around her. She knew, of course, how the Javanese revered the tree. Her baboo (nurse) had shown her the graves under its shelter elsewhere, and I think she was aware of a number of their superstitions. I can see the little white figure now, with its bare feet, and the small sweet face looking up. Behind the road the last ray of pink filtered through the branches of the cocoanut palms—which seemed as if delicately etched against the light—and it fell upon her.

"No, no!" she repeated again; "no, no!" and then the baboo had come up, with her slow, noiseless footsteps, and the child let herself be lifted into the usual position in which the Javanese carry their children, a little leg on either side of the nurse's hip, and the "slendak" (neck handkerchief) fastened around her. The fair little head rested against the woman's dark one, and then the two went in.

"She is a curious little thing," I thought; and then I wandered down the road to buy some matches at one of the native shops. The salesmen sit on banana leaves, on which lie huge slabs of tobacco and little pyramids of match boxes. For every one—young and old, rich and poor, down to the very brown naked baby-boys—smokes in Java; and then I went home. I had forgotten about the waringi.

CHAPTER II.

BUT Van Homerie had not! The next evening I returned rather later than usual from the gardens, and as I neared the bungalow, something seemed oddly unfamiliar about the landscape. I rubbed my eyes, and looked again. The waringi tree was gone! And then I saw that a group of natives were gathered round something which lay by the bungalow gate, and even at this distance I could hear the loud, passionate tones of their voices. And it takes a good deal to rouse a Javanese to any loud expression of his dissent to or disapproval from anything European!

Then, as I glanced towards the bungalow, I could see the

child's little white figure standing on the steps, and presently, very slowly, she came down and approached the group. One of them, a hadji (native priest), I saw by his turban, had, I almost fancied, beckoned to her, and now she stood before him, and the man, bending his face down to hers, said something in a low tone which I could not hear, and then pointed to the bungalow.

The child seemed to me to draw back with a little startled cry, and I spurred on my horse and, leaping down, took her up in my arms. It was as I feared. The spreading length of the holy tree lay by the fence and almost blocked the road, and two or three Chinese, working with their usual sphinx-like imperturbability, were cutting off the branches and carrying them away.

The Javanese followed my gaze, but they said nothing more till a new group came up, and then followed a noisy exclamation in low Javanese, and they gathered stormily round the two hadjis. It was then that the elder of the two pointed to the child in my arms with the most baleful look I have ever seen in any human face, and pronounced a single word in Javanese. I did not know what it meant, but I dispersed them, saying the Tuan would be home, and they went off in groups. Then I walked into the *pendoppo*, and, putting the child down, I called my boy. What did the word I had heard mean in Malay? He told me, and the English translation is "*bewitched*." So they fancied they had bewitched the child and the house! Silly fools! And yet I will own that I had a certain feeling of uneasiness as I went back to the child, who was sitting in a curious drooping attitude. Javanese superstition is very widespread, and communicates itself in many cases to the Dutch, who will avoid driving over certain evil or haunted spots, and will tell you openly the place is hadji-cursed. And the hadjis' power over the people is practically unlimited—and they were mortally offended now! Would they manage to do any mischief to my little girl?

Van Homerie came in at dinner time, and somehow I said nothing about the tree. He was rather more talkative than usual, and when we came back into the *pendoppo* after dinner he drew the child to him, and began to tell me a story of his young days in Amsterdam. The lamp was lit behind him, and I could see his face and the fair cropped head of the child. She had grown a little sleepy, and her face had just fallen back on his shoulder, when it seemed to me something dark and cold and in-

tangible crept past me. The child leapt to her feet at the same moment, and she pointed to the wall. "The hadji!" she whispered in a low, terrified voice, "the hadji! They will fall!"

There was no one there, but the next moment, as if swept down by an unseen hand, down went every pot of flowers on the wall, and the orchids strewed the floor, broken, amongst the earth.

"Who did that?" Van Homerie cried furiously, but no one answered.

The child stood trembling in every limb, and I drew her to me.

"Why did you say 'the hadji!'" I asked soothingly. "How did you know they would fall?"

"I don't know."

We called the boy, and, looking oddly perturbed, he swept up the *débris*. Van Homerie said the pots must have got loosened there, and I carried the child to bed.

Next evening every picture in the *pendoppo* fell on the floor, and again the child warned us with that stifled, frightened cry, "The hadji!"

Van Homerie made light of it all, and said she had been frightened by one of those "ugly vermin," but truth to tell I was growing oddly uneasy. Not that I apprehended danger exactly, but the child's look alarmed me. She never asked for stories now. She had forgotten the English I had taught her. Even Van Homerie observed that she seemed "a little dull," and I could see him feeling the tiny pulse and head, as if he dreaded incipient fever. Then events quickened. One night every picture in the place fell from the walls—another the china on the rack—another a large shower of stones pelted on the roof, and when we ran out not a native was in sight. And the stones were not of that locality, and were quite unknown to me. This happened three times.

And then came the end. It had been a sultry day, and about six o'clock the weather broke, and tremendous peals of thunder crashed above us, preceded by flashes of lightning which made me cover my eyes. I rode home rapidly, and found Van Homerie smoking in the long cane chair, while the child crouched beside him, pale and trembling.

"See if you can soothe her, Dick," he said to me in an oddly troubled way. "She's trembling from head to foot. Stones as big as your head have just crashed through the roof, and not a

soul in sight! If those devils continue this game much longer I'll send to Batavia for soldiers."

So he thought it *was* the hadjis!

I took the child on my knee, and I could feel every little limb tremble. "Why, childie," I said, "what is all this? Don't you know what the thunder is? They used to tell me long ago it was giants pitching things at each other, in the sky, and it ——"

And then suddenly I felt as if she stiffened in my arms. A vivid blinding flash. An awful crashing reverberation, and she started to her feet and pointed—it seemed quite close—with a dreadful look of terror. "The hadji!" she cried; "the hadji!" A black shadow fell over the *pendoppo*. The next moment she fell, as if struck down, and Van Homerie was on his knees beside her. He turned up the little white face, and we saw the widely-opened blue eyes, staring—dead! We felt her heart—not a pulsation; and he raised her with a dreadful shriek that rang above the awful peals of heaven's battery.

"Hell fiends!" he cried; "hell fiends! This is your work!" And then I caught her in my arms; for he sank back with a choking moan, senseless.

After that I cannot remember things very clearly. They seem blurred, in a kind of horrible maze of misery. I sent for the native doctor, "Doctor Djawa." He had studied in the native School of Medicine, in Batavia, and many said was more skilful than the European in the nearest town, and he examined the child carefully. She lay on her little bed, with its thin mosquito curtains, and I had put roses all about her, and in the small waxy hands. She was quite dead. Then I asked what she died of, and he looked up at me with an imperturbable gaze. "You would call it failure of the heart," he said in Malay. "But, why did he cut down the waringi tree?"

"What had that to do with it?"

He did not answer. He had gone in to see Van Homerie, who lay tossing deliriously in a raging fever.

We buried the child in the European cemetery, and I read the burial service of the Church of England over her. The tears smarted dully behind my eyes as I walked home. She was only a little child, but her loss made all the world seem empty and cold. I could scarcely bear to look at the bungalow and the steps of the *pendoppo*, on which I would never again see the

small white figure and the little closely-cut head. To feel her small arms around my neck once more I would have bartered all my world.

I tended Van Homerie, with the boys' help, for two nights, and then, worn out, I fell asleep about twelve o'clock, leaving the house-boy in charge. I think I wakened about six, and I went at once to the bedroom door. No one was there !

"Where is the Tuan ?" I cried, and the boy came running up.

"He has gone away."

"Away! Where to?"

He did not know. The Tuan had called the *toekan koedah* (horse-boy) at early dawn, and had bade him saddle his horse. He had mounted then and ridden away.

I waited all that day, and the next, expecting news. Then I went to the nearest town and made inquiries. Then I wrote to McMurdo's in Batavia, and to Samarang and Soerabaya. All answered alike. They knew nothing of Van Homerie, and had heard nothing! And from that day to this he has passed out of my life. I know not if he is alive or dead; if the curse of the hadjis reached and struck him down as it reached and struck down the child of our hearts, or if he lives broken-hearted, a voluntary exile from society. McMurdo kept me in his place, and I made money, and finally went home to Devonshire, and I am growing an old man now, with children of my own, and a dear English wife. But still, often in the dusk, I fancy I see the child's white face, with that dreadful look of terror, and I tell myself again and again that for her all fear is over for ever. But the little face haunts me, and the pointing hand, and I hear her whisper "the hadji!" in that tremulous *stricken* voice. I see the waringi tree, fatal as the upas, lying by the gate; and the natives gather round the child, and far away, beyond the cocoanut palms, the sun goes down redly and the swift eastern dusk falls. It falls above her grave now, and the Southern Cross gleams in the sky gem-like over the little mound.

But the child I know is not *there*.

A Drawn Game.

By CHRISTIE DUTTON.

"'GAVIN. Successfully accomplished. Remember vow. Widow Eve will meet her unknown soldier, thirteenth, Paddington, No. 6, 6 o'clock.' There is the cutting from the *Standard*; now for the likeness."

The chief opened a drawer, pulled out a photo, and examined it minutely; then looking up, with stern, critical glance, took in every detail of my appearance. He frowned slightly, posed his head on one side, pressed his lips together, shut his right eye, and looked at me with his left, opened his right eye, and looked at me with both, made another reference to the photograph, another from the photograph to me, finally laid it down, put his plump fingers together, leant back in his chair, crossed his legs, and gave a grunt of satisfaction. "Good. A little more black on the eyebrows, then you'll do. Now, Bürgiss, here is a chance for you to distinguish yourself. The man is ours, but his mouth is shut. We leave it to you to trip the woman. Remember," he uncrossed his legs again, leant over the *secrétaire*, and said impressively, "your point is *information*. Don't arrest her till you've got it. I leave you to form your own plans. You have a head on your shoulders, and, as a guide to your conduct and conversation, the text of her message will suffice."

An hour later, I was patrolling one of the long platforms of the London terminus, a handsome, black-eyed, middle-aged soldier, with a faultless figure and bold carriage.

I was well pleased with myself and my commission. The difficulty of the undertaking only gave a zest to my professional appetite, while the circumstances surrounding the affair possessed a spiciness and flavour that suited well my detective palate.

With head erect, cane held smartly under my arm, and enjoying a most seductive cigarette, I strolled leisurely up and down, amusing myself with taking a quiet observation of my fellow-men.

The typical representatives of the travelling class were well *en evidence*.

There was the fat old gentleman, standing, watch in hand, muttering imprecations against the station clock, because he was warm, weary, and half-an-hour too soon.

There was the lean office-clerk, breaking his teeth over a cheap, and consequently stale roll, in the buffet door. There was the angular maiden lady, with the corkscrewed, black-kid finger tips, dragging along a shivering toy terrier, for whom nothing was too good but a dog ticket, and whose canine lungs were inhaling murky air, prior to being thrust into the luncheon basket, alongside the raspberry vinegar. There were besides, let me add, a younger generation of more pleasing males and females, and it was with no small degree of satisfaction, I noted the looks of admiration these, and especially the latter, frequently bestowed upon me.

But the pleasure of these idle moments was destined to be of short duration.

The bell rang with a hoarse, hollow clang, and then, with a whirl and a whiz that blew the dust in clouds before it, the six o'clock northern express swept in.

I felt my task, in this crowd, somewhat like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay, but keeping to my previous resolution, I began my search opposite the first compartment, and so continued onwards.

It was while standing near the door of a third-class carriage, half-way down, that I was startled by a shrill Cockney voice exclaiming behind me:

"Gavin, are you looking for me?"

I turned quickly. A slight little lady in weeds stood before me. Her mourning was deep and somewhat dilapidated. A thick crape veil obscured her face, but I could see she was pale and sallow, with lantern jaws, very dark hair, and two bright black eyes, which shifted and sparkled behind the gauze as they travelled over me from head to foot.

"Widow Eve?" I bowed and raised my cap. "I am delighted to meet you at last." I observed the porters round us, and added, "You have boxes, I presume. May I get them for you?"

She shook her head, and raised her first two fingers to her lips.

"You are cold," I replied, nodding to show I understood her warning. "We will walk up and down a little. Come."

"Are we safe, Gavin?" the widow whispered, as we left the

porters. She raised her eyes with a plaintive, appealing look, then dropped them again, and a slender gloved hand was thrust through my arm with confiding familiarity.

It would have been an embarrassing situation to most men, but I was prepared for it.

"Quite safe, Eve," with a reassuring little pressure. "The platform is too full for any one to notice us. We will go to the further end."

We walked on in silence, but I kept my eyes open and presently found what I required.

"Stay a minute," I exclaimed carelessly, "here is a small third-class waiting-room, actually deserted; we will step in here. Now we can talk to our heart's content. There," I closed the door and placed Mistress Eve in a seat by the fire, facing the light, "now tell me"—I flattered myself my voice was both natural and agreeable—"have you been successful in these joint affairs of ours?"

"In both—perfectly so." She leant easily back in her chair, but her manner was reserved and uncommunicative, her thin lips opened and shut like a mouse-trap, with a firm, decisive jerk.

"Hem!" I mentally commented, "we were about right when we thought those burglaries the work of the same gang;" aloud I queried, "the Highgate and the Pinner ones, you mean?"

She nodded.

Now I was not going to put up with this state of things. "Let me see," I hummed and ha'ad, "what were the exact dates?"

She smiled superciliously. "Come, Gavin, you know that well enough, the 27th and 4th, of course. By the way, the female accomplice you required in the West End did not disappoint her employer, eh?"

"By George, 'deed she did not," I exclaimed heartily; "you've done right well, Evie dear."

The bait took. The woman got up and, throwing back her veil, walked up to me and laid her hand upon my arm, "And your vow?"

This was awkward. I turned the conversation. "Where is your swag?"

She started slightly, and a faint flush mounted to her cheeks.

You have surely brought it with you?" I caught her hand

roughly, and, unknown to her, while I held it pressed her pulse. It was beating quickly, in uncertain, fluttering throbs. It was evident she had suddenly lost her equanimity and become ill at ease. Her voice was steady enough.

"I could not bring it."

"Why not, pray?" I asked the question in brusque, surly tones, and held her close before me, while I studied the embarrassment written on her face.

"Oh, it was too much, but your promise——" I racked my brains, coughed, and cleared my throat. "You promised, you remember, to give me——"

"Ah! I remember!"

"Well now, what was it?"

"Half the value," I ventured with a mad recklessness, "that's right, is it not?"

"And take the risk," she added eagerly.

I nodded. I was too full of thankfulness to do anything else.

"But," she went on, with provoking pertinacity, "if I succeeded, there was to be a closer bond?" She scanned me through and through with her brilliant, restless eyes.

I turned my back to the window and registered the pattern of the heath-rug. The dickins! I was in a fix, and I had not yet attained all my desired information. Suddenly, something in the pose of her head and the expression on her face, inspired me.

"How can I marry any one," I replied sternly, pushing her away, "unless I have proof positive they have fulfilled my conditions?"

"Don't be impatient, Gavin, don't doubt me. You shall have all, the plate, the jewels, the loose stones, *all* that was taken on *both* occasions. I have them, every one, in my possession."

Her face grew animated, her tongue was let loose at last. "You must now give me the protection you promised. I will endanger my freedom and wear my life out for nothing less. I am not content to do great things, and get a comparative mean reward. As husband and wife, we could work with more success and less risk. To have *all* was your only condition. Tell me——"

"Tut, tut, you are right in what you say, but how do I know what the 'all' consists of?" I rejoined sulkily. "Is it worth my while, I wonder? I expected great treasures from those houses. Have you a list?"

She nodded quietly, and without demur handed me a soiled sheet of notepaper.

"Here, then ; perhaps you will name a treasure that does not figure there."

It was an inventory, written in a neat, business hand ; opposite the items the probable value of the articles was carried out.

We sat down close together to con it over. I smiled to myself as I did so. I found it corresponded exactly with the lists sent to Scotland Yard by Lady Dunstan and Colonel Fenwick.

"Good," I commented, when I had carefully noted every article, "now tell me when I can see them, and where?"

"Oh ! hem," she replied, somewhat nervously, "any time after—well—after to-day."

"Well, and where, where do you live, Eve?"

Again for a moment she hesitated, and the flush re-appeared on her cheeks.

"At present, No. 3, Wynchbrook Terrace, South Islington."

I noted it down.

"And yours?" she asked sharply, giving a swift upward glance into my face.

"That's safer for you not to know, my dear, at present."

She looked annoyed, and knit her brows.

"Do you think any one suspects us?" she questioned suddenly, with another searching look.

I shrugged my shoulders. "Pooh, what do I care? They will never arrest me (which was about the truest thing I had said). You have been a brave accomplice, Eve. There is no knowing what I may do for you. Don't get frightened though——"

She laughed, and it was neither a forced, nor an unpleasant laugh.

"Frightened! *I'm* not frightened, but listen, Gavin," her voice was quiet and firm, "I shall not tell you my secrets unless you tell me yours. Once more, where are your rooms?"

"Well, well," I replied, "I will humour you this once"—now, naturally, I had Gavin Dickson's address off pat—"No. 2, Cutting Lane, Silver Street, E."

She nodded, and I noticed the information pleased her.

"And what will you do with the things, old man, when you get them?"

"Oh! send them to a Southampton agent, and get them shipped abroad." I was as grave as a judge.

"And now, tell me this secret"—she placed her hand on my arm again, and watched me eagerly—"had you a share in that affair last night?"

"Sir John Robes'?" I asked raising my eyebrows; "why no, my love." Gavin had a harder bed than you wot of, madam, thought I, but I had had enough of her pumping business. "Come, Eve," I got up and felt for another cigarette; "you have done splendidly; you are a famous success. To-morrow I must come and overhaul the plate. What time do you return?"

"8.30."

"Then we shall have time before you go. What say you to a drive?"

She gave me a curious side-glance, a frightened look, I imagined, flitted across her face. It might have been my imagination only; anyway, the next moment it had gone, and her expression was only one of pleasure.

"Grand! I should love it, but Gavin," her voice was full of coaxing entreaty, "I must beg just one small favour. May we have a growler? I had ear-ache yesterday——."

"By all means," I replied; "anything else you would like?"

"Yes, if you please," and, upon my word, she raised her head with quite a pretty, bewitching gesture. "May I choose the route? I like a picturesque drive."

"Certainly," I replied, "certainly;" it was my policy to humour her.

We walked down to the platform and I hailed a fly. She suddenly dropped her handkerchief—as careless ladies will—and while I went back a few steps to pick it up, she gave her orders in a low tone to the cabby. As I approached, she turned towards the door. I followed. As she jumped in, I paused, ostensibly to pat the horse, and, tipping the driver, whispered:

"Before going to the lady's address call at Scotland Yard."

For a mile or so we were both supremely happy. I certainly was, for my plans had succeeded beyond my fondest hopes, and a rise of salary and distinction in the service lay within a stone's throw of my grasp. My accomplice chattered away in her shrill Cockney tones, and I was devoutly thankful she kept clear of sentimental subjects, for though I can manage most things, I

must own I am a fool at this. Her prospective marriage was, however, one of policy, pure and simple. "The sordid affections of the human heart"—as our bachelor curate styles them—were conspicuous only by their absence.

But soon we left the better streets behind, and began to clatter through gloomy thoroughfares, and whisk for short cuts through narrow warehouse-lined lanes. Then an uneasy look came over her veiled, pallid face. She looked at me and frowned. Needless to say I appeared unconscious of the fact. Her eyes had a strained expression in them; her gloved hands crossed and uncrossed each other in quick, fidgeting succession. A slight tapping sound told me she was drumming impatiently on the matted floor.

At length she could stand it no longer.

"This is not the way," she exclaimed irritably, letting down the window with a bang. "How stupid the fellow is! I wanted you to help me in a little business affair I must execute to-night, Gavin. I could do it so much better with you. This is quite the opposite direction. Cabby! Cabby!" she leant through the window, but I laid a hand on her arm.

"Patience, Eve, dear. The driver is all right. I have also to call at a business firm; I just asked him to go there first. Afterwards, I shall be happy——"

She shook my detaining hand off angrily.

"There is no time to drive round London to-night, even had I the inclination. Suppose we should be recognized? I will not go into your low 'dens with you. Cabby! Cabby!" Again she leant forward, and her London treble rose to a squeak.

"Sit down at once, Eve." I spoke with determination, and, dragging her back, pulled up the window.

She sprang to the opposite one.

"Help!"

I leant forward, and, stretching out my arm, seized hold of that strap also.

"Don't get excited," I smiled; "there is no occasion for help, if you will just keep calm and quiet."

She had hold of my right hand, and was wrenching the strap away. Suddenly a thought struck her. She let go, and turned towards the little window behind the box-seat. The time had come, I felt, for my *coup de main*. I left the window and,

taking her by the arms, placed her firmly down upon the seat.

"Sit there, madam, resistance is useless," I began ; "perhaps you may not be aware with whom you have to deal. Captain Fenwick's agent." I sat down opposite, and threw my card into her knee. She glanced at it, gave a little scream, and fell back against the cushions.

She lay there motionless, uttering no sound, apparently unconscious, while we drove on and on ; now crawling in the rear of some endless line of vehicles, now tearing across broader and less frequented squares.

I knew she had not fainted. Once I caught her flashing a glance at me, and the gleam in her eye and the smile playing round her mouth baffled even my comprehension. At length we pulled up at our destination. I blew my whistle, and three officers came out to meet us. The widow roused herself at their approach, but if she felt resistance was impracticable before, she realized it more than ever now. Her haughty spirit forsook her with her last hopes, despair was written on her countenance, her lantern jaws dropped, the light alone sparkled in her eye, as with bent head and subdued air she followed her body-guard into the office. I drew myself up with pride and satisfaction—as well I might—and presented her: "The Widow Eve."

"Pardon, Mr. Burgiss," a strange silvery voice startled me. The prisoner stepped into the middle of the room and raised her veil, and behold! the expression on her face had changed! "There is some solace in equality. You are unaware, perhaps, with whom you have to deal. The Widow Eve and her booty were safely lodged this afternoon! Lady Dunstan's agent." She bowed, smiled, and flung a card upon the *secrétaire*,

Mrs. Tylecote Ellington.

LADY DETECTIVE AGENCY.

Winter at Montreux.

"NOTHING for it but a winter abroad," the doctor had said, after making me go through all sorts of respiratory gymnastics for something like half-an-hour. For six long months I had been living in dread of this ominous "sounding," and now that it was over, and the verdict spoken, I scarcely knew whether to be disappointed or relieved. Of course my chest *must* be affected or I should not be ordered abroad, I mused (as I watched the doctor put back his stethoscope preparatory to departure), but after all, what was a little lung more or less? besides, to be just a trifle consumptive was considered interesting. Now I came to think of it, I remembered having been dreadfully jealous of a girl at school who had been that way inclined; I and a number of the other pupils even having gone the length of adding a petition to our nightly prayers that *we* might be allowed to develop the same interesting symptoms—the ethereal appearance and hectic flush with which heroines in novels are generally endowed towards the end of the third volume.

Yes, upon the whole, I was relieved. It would have been dreadful to have to face the anxious family conclave with the humiliating intelligence that there was nothing the matter with me. How the boys would have chuckled, and said that they had known all along that my illness was only a "sham;" and the girls! perhaps they would not have politely hinted that the sooner I resumed my share of the house work the better. *Now*, on the contrary, I should be a "woman of some importance," petted and coddled to my heart's content—and what a time I should have abroad!

"Where would you advise me to go to, doctor?" I asked, in a very languid voice, looking at the same time in the glass, to see whether the "hectic flush" was beginning to make its appearance. I *was* a trifle hectic, but unfortunately not in the right place. So annoying that colour will always fly to a feature that, in my case at any rate, requires no accentuation.

"You must not talk in that die away voice," the doctor said,

clapping me on the shoulder and regarding with an amused smile the invalidish airs I was already beginning to assume. "I am only sending you away as a precaution, and you may go wherever you think you can have the most fun. Switzerland would suit you very well."

Great was the excitement in the family circle when the news became known. The sympathy, as far as the girls were concerned, was swamped by the momentous question, who would be chosen to accompany me? Lina, I felt certain, although she discoursed eloquently on chest-preservers and inhalers, was mentally debating whether her new dress, with the addition of a little fur, would be suitable for a Swiss winter; while the shadow on Mabel's "noble brow" was accounted for by the fact that she and I had not been on speaking terms for a week, so *her* chances might be considered as *nil*.

For the three following weeks nothing was discussed, except "who should go?" "where we should go?" and "when we should go?" We might have been busy with the same questions till now, had not the doctor put a summary end to our wrangling by the curt remark that "if I did not make up my mind and go *at once*, I might as well stay at home, the November fogs being what he feared for me; and we were now in the middle of October." That settled it. Three days later I was safely landed at Montreux.

Why we had chosen Montreux out of the hundred and one places proposed I hardly know, unless it was a spirit of contrariety on my part that had turned the scale in its favour. No one recommended it, so I immediately wanted to go there. I was so tired of hearing about Davos Platz—horrid place, with people dying round you every day; I knew I should hate it—besides, I wanted to go somewhere where I should be petted and made much of. The only way to attract attention at Davos was to have nothing the matter with you.

Cairo, also, had been lauded as the nearest approach to a sanitary elysium that the earth could offer, but I did not like the photos of it with which my enthusiastic friend overwhelmed me. An elysium, wherein the favourite amusement seemed to be riding on refractory donkeys, failed to appeal to one of my romantic temperament. Fancy doing the "interesting invalid" on a brute that had to be poked with an umbrella to make it go!

"What place is this?" I asked, discarding the ugly pyramids and ubiquitous donkeys for a coloured photograph of a sunlit lake, snow-capped mountains and a picturesque old castle, standing out stern and rugged against the bluest of blue skies.

"Don't you recognize it?" my friend said, looking over my shoulder. "That is the Lake of Geneva, with Chillon in the foreground; we went there last summer when we were staying at Montreux."

Not another word would I hear about Cairo, which offended my friend so much that she would tell me very little about Montreux; but that little I liked, and what is more, I made up my mind on the spot that thither I would go, or else I would go nowhere. Quiet people like myself always get their own way, so on a cold bleak day, when everything at home was a study in grey and black, my eldest sister and I set out for this land of blue skies and sunny waters.

The journey was rather a tedious one! We left London about eleven a.m. to catch the mid-day boat to Calais: there had been a dreadful storm the day before, and we came in for what is called the "afterswell," to which I fancied I should infinitely have preferred the storm itself. A more pitiable object than I looked when I landed on the Calais pier it would be hard to imagine. Alas for my "hectic flush" I was *green*! My only consolation was that Lina was of the same ghastly hue. We were both feeling so seedy that we were only too glad to resign ourselves and our keys into the hands of an English speaking official, who gallantly offered to see our luggage through the Customs for us. "You go there . . . wait . . . me come after," he said, pointing to a long narrow shed, then disappearing in the crowd. We waited for a good ten minutes, then getting alarmed, confided our tale of woe to the custom house officer.

"Did the man to whom you gave your keys speak English?" he asked, with a smile, which changed into a broad grin on our answering in the affirmative. "Ah! then you need not expect to see him for another hour," he said; "he is having his afternoon lesson on some other English people."

"But what about our keys?" I asked indignantly.

"Oh, they will be all right. I will forward them to the custom house at Pontarlier, where your luggage will be examined again."

We were in that state of physical depression when not even

the loss of our keys had power to affect us! So we went off obediently, and took our places in the train, where, by dint of continual teas and occasional naps, we managed to while away the time till we reached Paris, about 10.30 p.m.

How we pitied our fellow-passengers who had determined to go straight through to Geneva, as we saw them wearily making for the night mail, while we turned towards the station hotel, with every prospect of a good night's rest before us. Our rest would not have been quite so good had we known that we were to be charged thirty francs for it and the two wretched meals we had had.

"I knew we should have to pay for all the titles with which that little wretch loaded us," Lina said, as we took our departure; the little wretch bowing and scraping till we were well out of sight, when, no doubt, he indulged in a quiet chuckle as he rattled our thirty francs in his pocket. That the English are "fair game" is quite an understood thing in foreign hotels; and English ladies travelling alone will do well to ask the price of *everything* (even a lemon squash, for which we had the pleasure of paying a shilling), else they are sure to be imposed upon, as we were.

The run from Paris to Pontarlier was very uninteresting. We spent most of our time in the dining saloon, where, when not eating, we liked to watch our French and German neighbours—some of whom evinced a most alarming capacity for taking nourishment. One old German in particular attracted our attention. He never budged an inch during the whole journey. We first saw him at the early breakfast, when he demolished a whole basket full of fresh rolls; then he gave his attention to a book until *déjeuner* appeared; of this he ate so heartily that he found no difficulty in sleeping until dinner time, when he seemed quite ready to fall to again. After watching him wade steadily through five courses we changed our places, as I thought I detected symptoms of an approaching fit. This catastrophe was, however, averted, and on our arrival at Pontarlier we left him happy with a pipe and a bottle of lager beer.

Anything like the cold on coming out of the overheated train on to the platform I have never felt! They may well say that Pontarlier stands higher almost than any other town in Switzerland. I should have thought we were on top of Mont Blanc itself from

the temperature. Regardless of being mistaken for a squaw in her blanket, I wrapped myself up in the Austrian rug from head to foot, and let Lina lead me to the custom house, where the first thing that greeted our eyes was our luggage, piled up in a corner all to itself. We explained about our keys, and were told that they had not arrived, but *might* come by the morning post.

"A good thing we did not want to go on to Montreux to-night," Lina said, as we looked round for the 'bus which we had ordered to meet us. A very antiquated conveyance it was when we found it—a cut between a bathing machine and a Noah's ark; however, we were far too tired to be critical (a wheelbarrow would have been welcome under the circumstances), so, together with three other shivering mortals, we jumped in and were driven off as quickly as the poor skeleton horse could take us.

The hotel matched the 'bus exactly, they must both of them have dated from the middle ages; the entrance hall was paved with stone, and seemed to be the rendezvous for all the idlers of the neighbourhood—at least I *hoped* the men we saw lounging and smoking about were not inmates of the place.

Stone steps led up to our bedroom, which was also innocent of carpets or any other signs of luxury. Glad that our sojourn here was to be only a short one, we threw off our wraps and hastened down to the dining-room, whose blazing fire of pine logs seemed the one redeeming point of the establishment. We were really not hungry; but we ordered some coffee and rolls, so that we might have an excuse for remaining to watch the scene before us, which was a perfectly novel one.

The room was low and narrow, with dark oak beams across the ceiling, and a polished wooden floor; at the centre table some English people, who had just arrived, were having *table d'hôte*, and airing their execrable French on a waiter, who spoke English perfectly: while at the further end of the room, seated at various small tables, were workmen in their blue linen smocks, soldiers in the pretty grey and red uniform of the country, and two or three of the suspicious-looking loungers from outside; all regaling themselves with a little beer or coffee and a great deal of gossip.

We retired early so as to be ready for our journey on the morrow.

"It is useless to try the watch trick here," Lina said, turning down the bed-clothes and looking with dismay at the palpably wet

sheets; "all we can do is to sleep in our rugs and bribe the chamber-maid to bring us all the hot-water tins she can lay hands on."

All the hot-water tins turned out to be three funny-looking brown stone jars (very insecurely corked), two of which were handed over to me. "If you hear screams during the night you will know that one of the corks has come out," I remarked, as I gave them an additional twist, and arranged the bottles so that they would not be likely to roll on to the floor and terrify the people below. In spite of the rather primitive arrangements, we slept very well!—in fact, too well—for before we were half dressed we saw the bathing-machine coming down the road to take us to the train.

This time we got into a carriage with some of our compatriots; among them a lady and her husband, also bound for Montreux. They seemed to know as little about our destination as we did—the only piece of information they volunteered being that the hotels down by the lake were to be avoided, on account of the mist that rises from the water every night and morning.

Just our luck! We had engaged rooms at the Hotel —, on purpose that our windows *should* overlook the lake; however, they were only taken by the week, so we should be able to "move on" if we found the place unhealthy.

The lady's husband, it seemed, was consumptive; but he was evidently not as philosophical over his enforced exile as I was. It is so different for a man—to whom a lingering illness means the throwing up of his career, and an unlimited amount of sympathy and coddling (to neither of which the average man takes kindly) in exchange for the hopes and ambitions connected therewith. I did not wonder that my neighbour seemed surly and morose; but felt very sorry for his poor wife—a sweet woman, who did her best to appear cheerful and keep up the illusion that they were travelling merely for pleasure, and not as a matter of stern necessity.

At four o'clock we arrived at Geneva, where we had an hour to wait. I asked the station master whether we should have time to drive to Voltaire's house at Ferney: he feared not; so we had to content ourselves with taking a small boat over to "Rousseau's Island," where we had coffee; then, after a look at the jewellers' shops (for which Geneva is famous), we returned to the station, just in time to catch our train.

The railway keeps by the lake the whole time between Geneva and Montreux; but I must confess, that our first impression of the land of our exile was not a favourable one! The water was slatey grey, the sky very leaden-looking, with dark rain clouds floating over the mountains; altogether, the landscape had far too much in common with an English one to be pleasing. To cheer the company, all of whom were more or less depressed, I unearthed from my bag the little picture of Chillon (which I had brought away with me to act as a talisman during the journey). "You *must* see what the lake looks like at its best," I said, handing it first to my fellow invalid, whose spirits had gone down to zero.

"Your artist must have bought up some ultramarine very cheap," he said, glancing from the picture to the scene outside, "or else is in the habit of painting in blue spectacles."

With this, he returned the picture, and retired into his corner, determined to be miserable if he liked.

We knew, from the familiar names of the stations we were now passing through, that our destination was at hand. Lausanne, Vevey, Clarens (the home of Rousseau's Julie), and then at last *Montreux*.

"The shades of night were falling fast"—so was the rain—as we stepped out on to the deserted-looking platform. The man from the hotel was waiting for us, and lost no time in seeing us and our luggage into the 'bus (quite an imposing machine this time, with "Lumière Electrique" and "Ascenseur Hydraulique" painted in letters of gold all over the windows). "We are going to get lots for our money here, evidently," Lina said, wondering what "Ascenseur Hydraulique" might mean.

Very little of the town was to be seen on account of the rain; and our hopes were not raised when the 'bus drew up before a dingy-looking entrance, flanked by tall palm trees in bright green tubs. The hotel proprietor and all the menials of the establishment were on the steps to meet us. The former handed us out, and (in spite of the pouring rain) treated us to a set speech in very shaky English: the gist seemed to be that there was only one hotel in Montreux worth mentioning, and that he was the manager thereof; he "hoped we would be very happy and comfortable"—meanwhile we were getting very wet, so I interrupted him with a fit of coughing, which had the desired effect; he allowed us to enter and showed us up to our rooms.

"Beautiful balconies overlooking the lake," he said, drawing back the curtains; our enthusiasm was not as great as it would have been had we heard nothing about the mist, which was already perceptibly rising towards the said balconies. "Dinner will be ready in a few minutes," he continued, disappointed at our want of appreciation, and with a profound bow he left us to our own devices.

"Let us have a wash and then go down as we are," Lina said; "we shall be coming to bed immediately after dinner, so it's no use unpacking."

It was just as well that we had decided to do so, for in less than ten minutes the gong sounded; and as it was we were among the last people to enter the *salle à manger*, a long narrow room with a large table down the centre and small private ones at either side. At one of these we sat down, and took stock of our neighbours; such a funny set of people, all of them of the most pronounced fossil type. I saw nothing under sixty, except a weedy-looking youth, who had evidently strayed in by mistake, and looked as though he would give his week's pocket-money to be out again. The favourite style of evening dress among the ladies consisted of some elaborate lace arrangement, plastered very inartistically on top of an ordinary walking dress; over this again was worn (why, I failed to see, for the room was not cold) either a knitted cape or an old plush mantle.

Two old maids at the table next to ours were evidently regarded as the *kittens* of the party; they had pink and blue ribbons tied coquettishly round their scraggy necks, and on their heads the most wonderful erections of birds, flowers and lace.

We noticed that as each new-comer arrived and took his or her place, all the people near them made a profound bow; it now dawned upon me why the kittens at the next table were looking so indignant. When we sat down, I had noticed that they squirmed about in a very peculiar manner, but I paid no attention, in fact I thought it would be kind to look the other way, as they might be in pain, or afflicted with some nervous complaint; but now I understood that these contortions had been in way of greeting, and determined at the earliest opportunity to retrieve my reputation.

"Don't be surprised," I said to Lina, "if you see me bowing

vigorously to the old ladies at the next table ; it is evidently the custom here ; and we have got into hot water for not having complied with it."

The dinner was splendid ; but when we had had about six courses and were waiting for the sweets, all at once the lights went out and we were left in total darkness. A great deal of clapping and merriment ensued, and then the door was suddenly thrown open and about twelve waiters rushed in, bearing in their hands illuminated puddings, pretty little chalet-shaped meringues, with red and blue lights shining through the miniature windows.

"What babies foreigners are," Lina said, with an air of profound contempt, as we watched a Frenchman opposite, laughing fit to kill himself, as he unroofed the chalet, to discover how the night-light was put inside.

There was very little but night-light left when the pudding came to us, so *we* had no difficulty in solving the riddle ; though, not being of an inquiring turn of mind, we would have preferred less mechanism and more meringue.

* * *

A glorious surprise greeted us the following morning when, on drawing up the blinds, we saw stretched out before us a perfect living duplicate of my magic picture : sky and water, "deeply, darkly, beautifully blue ;" the snowy mountains, dim and ethereal in the distance, and, almost within a stone's-throw of our balcony, the Castle of Chillon, its rugged grey walls one blaze of flaming Virginian creeper. "I hope that consumptive gentleman feels ashamed to-day of the rude remarks he made about my beautiful lake," I said, as I hastily dressed myself, so as to be able to go and sit on the balcony, which looked very inviting this morning, with its trailing roses and cosy basket chairs.

"If only I were clad in a white velvet gown, with a knot of roses at my throat, I should feel quite Ouidaesque," Lina said when, half-an-hour later, we sat sipping our coffee in the open air, dividing our admiration between the lovely view and the heavenly honey : as a great treat I was allowed to take my breakfast on the balcony "*just for once*"—but I was fain to admit that, like all *nice* things, it savoured of the *naughty*, after what we had been told of the morning mist.

Our *al fresco* meal over, we went out to see the town : a brighter, cleaner little place it would be hard to imagine—and

such shops! Here we had come away with enough things to last us for a twelve-month, thinking that in an out-of-the-way place in Switzerland if we found one "*all sorts*" shop we might think ourselves well off. I could almost have cried with vexation as I stood, lost in admiration, before blouses such as I had never dreamed of, dresses *à la dernière mode*, and hats that were far too lovely to wear, and seemed made only to stand behind plate-glass windows and sow discontent and envy in the hearts of the passers-by. Lina comforted me by saying that my head-gear (which up till now I had considered the acme of perfection) was "really not so bad;" and we sought further to console ourselves by indulging in some of the scrumptious cakes, which at least were within the limits of slender means such as ours.

Coming out from the market, laden with grapes and flowers, we saw some people getting into an electric tram with "Vevey à Chillon" written across it. "Do let us get on," I said; "we shall have lots of time before lunch; and I want to be able to tell the girls in my first letter all about Chillon." We were somewhat surprised to find that we were the only ladies "on top." "Never mind," Lina said, resolutely keeping her place, in spite of the inquiring glances of the men around, "if people like to sacrifice comfort to etiquette, let them do it! I can just imagine how unbearable it must be inside on a day like this," for although October was well advanced the weather was still hot and sultry.

The tram kept to the main road, but the shops did not extend very far, and were succeeded by gay villas smothered in roses and picturesque hotels, in the grounds of which stylishly-dressed people flitted to and fro, looking in their harlequin costumes like bright butterflies among the dark foliage of the trees. Then the road became more countrified, sprinkled with homely little *châlets* and intersected by footpaths, which gave promise of lovely mountain climbs to those of an exploring turn of mind.

In about ten minutes we were put out with a number of other people (mostly Americans) at the gates of Chillon. The draw-bridge and moat looked anything but formidable—the former covered with ivy and roses, the latter filled up with ferns and flowering shrubs. A stall, outside the castle, was devoted to the sale of photographs and other mementoes of the place. We

invested in six little gilt cow-bells adorned with different views to send to the girls at home, and then followed our portly guide into the hallowed precincts of the castle.

The length of this article does not permit of a detailed account of all that we saw, but I must just say a word about the dreadful dungeon—the scene of Bonivard's imprisonment. The entrance to it was so dark and rocky that I wondered the prisoners never broke their necks before arriving at their destination! Two or three old ladies of the party, after coming for a few yards, went back in despair; and it was as much as we could do to keep our equilibrium, but I was glad that we had persevered when at last we emerged into a weird-looking place, more like a cathedral crypt than anything else, with its rows of massive pillars and its pointed archways. *There* was the pillar to which Byron's "prisoner" had been chained! *There* the place where his brother's corpse had been buried; and there, high up above our heads, the narrow window through which the little bird had flown to cheer with its gay carolling the heart-broken survivor, till, half dead with cold and hunger, it had winged its way up again into the bright sunshine, leaving him thus "so doubly lone."

Passing out from the dungeon we were shown the stone bed (cut in the rock) upon which condemned prisoners were "*permitted*" to sleep the night before they were executed, and also a trap-door with a horrible legend attached. It seems that a favourite method of disposing of troublesome people in days gone by was to imprison them in the adjoining dungeon, and then bribe one of the warders to plan with them an easy method of escape: the prisoner was to go down through the trap-door, where he would find a flight of stone steps leading to the water; arrived there, he would be met by an accomplice, who would row him away in his boat before the escape should become known. The poor prisoner, delighted at the prospect of so easily regaining his freedom, would go gaily down the first two or three steps, then the trap-door would suddenly bang to, and he would be precipitated on to a number of naked swords, which in their turn would revolve and consign his dead body to the black waters underneath.

To think that my lovely Chillon should ever have been guilty of such horrible deeds! I was quite glad to get out of the

dungeon again and be able to look back at the castle, as merely a picturesque point in the landscape, though it was a long time before I could admire it without the recollection of these tales of horror rising up to spoil the pleasant impression.

Lunch over, we sat and read on the balcony, where we also made our afternoon tea, after which Lina insisted on my coming in, as the fatal hour of sunset was approaching—fatal, but oh, so beautiful! The water one broad expanse of rippling gold; the purple mountains, their snowy summits just tinged with palest pink; a sky in which all the colours of the rainbow vied with each other for supremacy; and, coming towards us, a tiny boat with the pretty crossed sails, which are only seen on the Lake of Geneva, and which have the appearance of snowy outspread wings.

So passed our first day at Montreux; and the programme of each succeeding one was much the same, only instead of visiting Chillon, we would go to one of the many places of interest in which the neighbourhood abounds. We only stayed a week in the Hotel —. The food was the only good thing about it, and we had not yet arrived at the age when *that* is the first consideration. We were advised to go to the Grand Hotel at Territet, but when we heard that there was a dance there nearly every night, and that to appear twice in the same gown was considered a breach of etiquette, we decided that it was no place for *us*, so went to a very comfortable hotel standing half-way up the hill at Montreux, and from the balcony of which we had the same lovely view (without so much of the mist) as we had had at the hotel by the lake. And now for a few words about the climate and advantages of Montreux for those forced to winter abroad. From my own experience of last winter I should advise delicate people to "take in" Montreux on their way to the Riviera; going there in the beginning of September and leaving at the end of October. These two months are all that could be desired; warm and sunny as our English August, just the weather for lolling on the balconies (with which all the windows are provided), going the steamer trips to the pretty little villages at the other side of the lake, or taking long drives out into the country, through the purple vineyards and the flower-laden lanes. November, on the contrary, is bleak and foggy, at least it was so last year, and an English

doctor we met at the hotel told me that it is so *every* year, and that invalids should leave for the Riviera not later than October.

People who are fairly strong can pass the whole winter very pleasantly at Montreux. During the dull November days they can betake themselves to the Kursaal, where, if not musically inclined, they can win or lose a few francs over "les petits chevaux." Once the November fogs are over, the clear frosty weather begins; and the air is alive with the tinkle of sleigh bells, the clattering of skates, and the "Gard! Gard!" of the merry tobogganers as they come tearing round the corners on their dangerous-looking "luges." Every night there is a "sound of revelry" in one of the many hotels (all of which, though their name is legion, seem to flourish in a most surprising manner). Now it is a fancy dress ball at Territet; next night private theatricals at the "Beau Site," then the "Cygne" distinguishes itself by an amateur concert, and the "National" blossoms forth into charades. To all of these entertainments an enterprising stranger can gain admittance, if he goes the right way about it, or, if he prefers to stay in his own hotel, there is always music, cards and mild flirtation to while away the long winter evenings.

Speaking of flirtation reminds me that there is one class of people whom I would seriously warn against choosing Montreux as a field for their campaigns, and these are the much laughed at, but really to be pitied, mothers with marriageable daughters. How many of these unselfish creatures there are who, every year, leave their household gods and their comfortable fireside to wander forth in strange lands, among people whose language they do not understand, in order to give "Evelina" and "Dora" a chance of meeting with the "eligible parties" they have failed to discover at home! Dear creatures, I would not for the world that your self-sacrifice should be wasted; nor yet the hard-earned money which paterfamilias is unwillingly persuaded to sink in this matrimonial speculation. So I tell you in time to take Evelina and Dora to Davos Platz if you like; their rosy cheeks and sound lungs will be at a premium in a place where death hovers over two-thirds of the population; or take them to Cairo, and let them go flirting expeditions on donkeys—but *do not* take them to Montreux! The

only eligible men there are idle foreigners (with long names and short purses), who haunt the hotels in hope of picking up an English "mees," whose comfortable little *dot* will come in handy to settle the "Baron von Hughelheine's," or the "Count de la Rossignol's" gambling debts. These men will hover round a pretty girl until they find that her "face is her fortune," then they will suddenly "cool off," and when "madame la mère" begins to look inquiringly at them, they will find that they are suddenly recalled to the death-bed of a grandmother or some other equally interesting relative.

One word about the favourite form of entertainment among the English exiles at Montreux and I have finished. I mean the afternoon tea parties which are in vogue all during the winter months, and which excite quite a healthy spirit of emulation among the old ladies of the community. Any one who makes herself fairly popular at the hotel at which she happens to be staying, can get an invitation "out to tea" every day if she feels so inclined; and the beauty of the thing is, that she can accept the invitation without going *out* at all; no deliberations as to what she shall put on; no earnest study of the weather glass is necessary. She merely takes her afternoon nap, and when the solitude of her own room grows oppressive, she sallies forth and goes into No. 22 or 45 (as the case may be), where she finds the kettle gaily singing on a bright wood fire, and her hostess busily laying out her dainty china, on the whitest of afternoon tea cloths, while her maid or her daughter runs to the dairy round the corner for some delicious thick cream. The box of cakes purchased in the morning is then unpacked, the flowers placed artistically in the centre of the table, and everything is ready for the fray, everything except the scandal—each guest is expected to bring his or her share of that, for men (of a kind) are not unknown at these festivities. To be sure they are of the "*tame cat*" species, who love to purr inanely to an admiring audience, but, as I have said, *anything* in the shape of a man is hailed with delight at Montreux; one learns there to be thankful for small mercies, even when they take the shape of a dissenting minister, who talks about "mamma" and wishes to know "which is your favourite flower."

Sometimes there are as many as a dozen guests at these kettle-drums, and at others they assume the proportions of a quiet

tête-à-tête, but always they are a break in the monotony. Where a number of people are shut up together for a whole winter in a foreign hotel, they are obliged to have recourse to such methods of killing time, and I know of no better way of whiling away the tedious hours between an early lunch and a late dinner than the one just described, which is fatal only to one's digestion, and maybe the character of one's neighbour.

Crossed at Right Angles.

A STORY.

By S. J. DOUGLAS.

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER Gertrude had left him Gervase went into the great empty station to smoke a cigarette before going to bed. But he forgot to light it. He sat down on a bench, plunged his hands into his pockets, and lost himself in a bewildering maze of thought. Hitherto he had been drifting contentedly on in the stream of events, conscious only that he was being borne through a pleasant region of new sensations.

The vexation caused by opposition—that had been as boulders in the bed of the stream. But now the roaring of a dam in the distance reached his ear. He began to be dimly conscious that he was approaching deep waters.

He rested his head on his hands and tried to think it out. Was he really in love with this girl? It was incredible, ridiculous. He had only known her ten days. He knew nothing about her except that she fascinated him; he did not know where she lived, or who her people were. He could not bear the idea that she would pass out of his life, and that he should never see her again. It was impossible. The question was, What was to be done in the future? An unreasonable anger took possession of him. Why had he not been born a rich man? Why should he not ask the first woman he wanted to be his wife? Here was a dilemma for a man, and one in which he could hardly have believed he would ever find himself placed—in love with a penniless girl, unknown to him a week ago, a stray meteor in his path.

Was he in love? Was it love, this vague, painful longing for he knew not what, this unsatisfactory feeling of incompleteness, this striving half angrily against the inevitable? A vision of Gertrude as he had seen her last, on the stairs, her dark eyes

shining in her white face with a strange new light, rose before him. Then the torturing doubts of love burst upon him in their full force. Did she care for him? He remembered her first coldness, how indifferent and bored she had been. She was always cold except when the spirit of teasing seized her. How silent and *distracte* she had been all day. She had not spoken to him all yesterday. She had said nothing about missing the train, and was evidently angry with him. She had left him as soon as she possibly could. And yet—and yet women were deceivers if they could lead men on, as she had led him, and then desert them. Surely she cared for him, or had she only been amusing herself? She was so beautiful, so clever, she could use men as her playthings, and laugh to see them grovelling at her feet. But no! that was not like her. A queen among women she might be, but not cruel; womanly always and even weak. How tired and white she had looked as she said good-night, too tired almost to speak, but her eyes had spoken plainly. His doubts left him as he remembered their passionate fire, as he recalled the thrill that had passed between them at the touch of their hands.

It was growing cold. He rose to his feet, lit a cigarette, and began pacing up and down the platform. As he walked and smoked, he grew calmer. The blood left his fevered brain and circulated tranquilly through his body. His was a sanguine nature, keenly susceptible to the promptings of desire, prone to alternate fits of depression and elation, keenly sensitive to pain and joy, slow to kindle but quick to burn. The kindling process had begun, but as yet the fire was only smouldering.

Next morning, after a good night's sleep, there was little of the previous night's mood left. He rose, composed and strong in mind and body, determined to act promptly and decisively. To-day must decide his fate and Gertrude's.

There was another alternative, that he refused to consider for a moment, though it thrust itself persistently into the background of his thoughts. He knew it would be thrust upon him in every persuasive form and shape by Miles and Fanny and every one: that of leaving matters as they stood, simply parting from Gertrude with only that amount of regret and hope of meeting again which the politeness of one guest to another in the same house-party requires. He was determined to resist

this alternative to the last, backed up as it was by the most undeniable dictates of common sense.

The sun was shining over a clean, snow-powdered country as they viewed it from the windows of the railway carriage.

They were both very silent as the train carried them swiftly along. Gervase tried to read a paper, but instead of absorbing the latest news, he found that his brain was framing arguments which were to combat and confuse any reasons that might be brought to bear against the course of action he intended to pursue.

While he was strengthening his outposts and resorting to every expedient to fortify his position, which he knew would seem a weak one, even indefensible from some points of view, and subject to overpowering attacks, Gertrude was sitting in her corner, also mentally reviewing the situation. Her standing ground was on another level altogether. She had no fortress to defend. It was already in ruins around her. It had been an airy fabrication of her own brain, a structure never meant to stand against the battering-rams of common sense, never meant to see the light of day.

She dreaded the eyes of the bystanders in her humiliation; she trembled as she thought of the reception that awaited her at Blackwaters. Lady Fanny had been angry before; what would she be now? Gertrude even thought wildly of going home to escape the cold looks and frigidly polite words that she knew awaited her, but such a course would only make matters worse. It would seem cowardly, as if she were running away from the consequences of a fault. She knew she had done nothing wrong. She had been the victim of unfortunate circumstances, and she strove to call pride to the rescue, but her spirit was trodden under foot. She owned herself defeated on every side.

She concealed her feelings so well, however, when she and Gervase arrived at the house, that Lady Fanny said afterwards to her husband:

"She was brazen-faced, absolutely *brazen*! I never saw anything like it."

"I don't know about that, my dear," Mr. Adare said uneasily.

He had seen the quiver of the proud lip and heard the catch in the cool voice as Gertrude met her hostess.

"My own opinion was," he said, with a note of self-accusation in his voice, "that she was on the point of breaking down. Poor girl! I think Gervase has behaved disgracefully, and I shall tell him so."

"Good heavens, Miles! If you do, he will marry her."

"I am not at all sure that it would not be the best thing he could do—if she would have him, which no one doubts for a moment!"

"Because there is no reason to doubt," said Lady Fanny. "Oh dear, didn't I say she wasn't a nice girl? Didn't I say I wouldn't have her under my roof? I was perfectly right, you see. She ought never to have come here."

"Nonsense, my dear girl! There is no harm done; there has merely been rather a dangerous flirtation, but it will be all right in the end. They will feel extremely injured and ill-used at parting, but they will get over it in a week or two."

"Well, I am sure I hope so," said Lady Fanny, "and it shan't be my fault if it ends in any other way. We must go to the dance to-night, but I won't have her sitting out with Gervase if I have to go and rout them out of corners myself."

"You had much better leave it alone now, my dear," said Mr. Adare. "It's my opinion that they have gone so far, they must arrange their own affairs. Interference will do no good, and unless they ask our help we have no business to meddle. So mind, Fanny, behave exactly as if nothing had happened. I won't have any cold-shouldering in my house."

"It's the last time she shall come here," grumbled Lady Fanny, secretly determined to disregard her husband's injunctions and prevent the match at all costs. "One comfort is, Gervase will never meet her anywhere else unless Agnes brings them together, and I'll just give her mother a hint."

Gertrude found that her fears had been exaggerated. Every one was as kindly disposed towards her as yesterday. Indeed, Mr. Adare was more than usually kind. He made her sit beside him at luncheon and exerted himself to amuse her. Gervase purposely avoided her, and as she noticed his abstraction and remembered how silent he had been all the morning her heart sank lower and lower, for she supposed that he was tired of her already.

"I am going to take you girls out for a drive this afternoon,"

said Lady Fanny, peeling a grape for Seraph, who, seated in her high chair, watched the process with interest. "It will be good for our complexions, and when we come in you shall have a cup of tea, and then go and lie down to rest before beginning to dress. We have to start at half-past eight, as Mrs. Marsters begged me to be early; so dinner will be at seven."

"That means that you begin to dress at four o'clock, I suppose," said Captain Taylor.

"Goodness! You don't mean to say you take all that time?" said Lady Fanny quickly, turning her laugh against him.

He did not join in the laugh. He sometimes thought Lady Fanny was rather too funny.

Gertrude enjoyed the drive. The fresh air revived her drooping spirits, and she remembered that the ball was yet to come. There were several hours of happiness at least in store for her, and she caught some of the contagion of the Alston girls' wild excitement. They anticipated nothing but "*tremendous fun*" at the ball, and constantly referred to the coming pleasure in little ecstasies of rapture, which afforded Lady Fanny great amusement. She was too good-natured to bear malice, and by the time they returned to tea her manner to Gertrude showed no signs of ill-feeling.

Tea was served in Lady Fanny's own room, and the ladies enjoyed it in strict privacy. Then they retired to their own rooms; and Gertrude, for one, threw herself on the bed and slept heavily until the dressing gong wakened her. She woke shivering and chilled, with burning cheeks and shining eyes. Her fingers trembled as she dressed. Wild excitement suddenly possessed her, but during dinner it died away. She could not eat. Her head ached. She felt strangely giddy and faint.

With an effort she pulled herself together and forced herself to eat and drink. Gradually she grew composed, and when she took her seat in the carriage with the other ladies, she believed herself to be quite cool and collected and prepared for whatever should betide.

"At all costs I will enjoy myself to-night," she said to herself as the carriage bowled along. "It is only for one night. I am reckless. He shall be mine for to-night. I care for nothing else."

The carriage drew up at the door of a brilliantly illuminated

house ; a vista of bright lights, flowers and gay dresses was seen through the open door ; the "sounds of revelry by night," the distant scraping of fiddles, came from within.

"Let us eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die," said the eldest Miss Alston gaily as she got out of the carriage, holding her satin gown high and exhibiting her neat ankles in silk stockings and white shoes.

There were countless lamps and a forest of palms and ferns, and red carpet all the way up the broad stairs.

At the top of the stairs they caught a glimpse of the ball-room before turning into the cloak-room, and the first figure that caught Gertrude's eye among the men standing round the doorway was the familiar one of Mr. George Allison. It gave her an unpleasant shock. He was the last person she expected or wished to see.

CHAPTER XIII.

GERVASE arrived at the ball in an execrable temper. His excitement, aggravated by uncertainty, had been growing more and more intense as the day went on, and various circumstances had served to increase his irritability.

First of all, he had gone out to shoot pigeons late in the afternoon with his brother-in-law, but they had waited about and got very cold without getting a single shot. Gervase could not get warm again, and a slight twinge of rheumatism made itself felt in his left shoulder.

While he was dressing for dinner, his white tie exasperated him to the last pitch of frenzy, and at dinner he sat between Miss Alston and young Mr. Davies, who were very anxious to talk to each other, and were extremely bored with his intervention, though they strove to hide it, whereas Gervase merely gave way to his inclinations, and sat between them, a stolid, sulky bear.

In the carriage going to the ball, he got cramp in his legs, and his glove split all across the palm when he put it on.

At any other time such mishaps would not have provoked him, but in his unwontedly excited state they drove him nearly mad. Lastly, he stepped into a puddle when he got out of the omnibus.

It was some time before he recovered from the last blow, for his shoes had to be dried, and the third dance on the programme was in full swing when he at last appeared.

He looked round the room at once for Gertrude, but before he had had time to distinguish her he heard a voice at his elbow:

"Aren't you going to say how-do-you-do, Gervase?"

Then a softer voice:

"What have you been doing all this time?"

He turned and saw Agnes, looking up at him with bright eyes. In spite of her dowdy old white gown and the prim arrangement of her hair, she looked quite pretty, with some colour in her cheeks. Behind her stood a portly, commanding-looking lady, dowdily attired in velvet, with a tiara of diamonds, looking cold and unprotected, perched on her thin, smooth hair. In spite of her dowdiness, she had the appearance of a *grande dame*. Behind her was another portly, smiling personage, Agnes' august papa. All three shook hands with Gervase and expressed themselves extremely pleased to see him.

"How very energetic of you to come," he said, with more surprise than pleasure in his voice.

"Yes, indeed," said Lady Belton, "most extraordinary energy. We are quite surprised at ourselves. But, you see, dear Agnes wanted so much to come, though, like the good girl she is, she said nothing about it. She was so good, she really deserved the little treat, and I should not like her to think that her parents were incapable of a small sacrifice of their own convenience in order to give her pleasure."

"No, indeed," said Lord Belton, rubbing his hands. "I should be grieved indeed if Agnes had not a better opinion of her old parents than that."

"It was very, very kind of you to come," murmured Agnes dutifully.

"We had dinner at six, and started at seven," said Lady Belton. "It is seventeen and a half miles from the lodge gates, and there is a good deal of snow on the roads in some parts. However, we provided ourselves with plenty of rugs and coats, and a hot-water bottle each for our toes, and the drive did not seem so very long. We were the first to arrive and had plenty of time to thaw ourselves in Mr. Marsters' delightful sitting-room. And now dear Agnes is pining to dance." The last words were suggestive, almost

authoritative, but Gervase was in no hurry to take the hint. "How is your dear mother, Gervase?" went on Lady Belton, as he showed signs of restiveness. "I heard through Mary Dundas, who was staying with us last week for two nights on her way to the Clumbers, that she had a bad cold last month. Lucy Hume had been staying with your mother and wrote to Margaret from there, and she sent it on to Mary."

"I believe my mother is quite well again," said Gervase.

"Ah, I am very glad to hear it," replied Lady Belton, with her piercing eyes fixed scrutinizingly upon him. People who were honoured by a conversation with her usually felt inclined to wriggle, as if they were periwinkles being extracted from their shells by a remorseless pin. "I am very glad to hear it. I asked Fanny just now, and she said she didn't know. She hadn't even heard that your mother had had a cold. Who is the young man with the bald patch and the high collars she is dancing with just now?"

"Who? Where?" said Gervase. He had just caught sight of Gertrude. In his appreciative eyes, she was the most distinguished-looking girl in the room, her slim figure dressed all in black, her dark hair unadorned, no colour except the warm white of her skin and the red on her lips, no jewels but her two bright dark eyes. She was standing beside a short, dark man, who was talking with great animation and, as Gervase thought jealously, with familiarity.

Lady Belton's voice broke in again.

"No, no," she was saying with some asperity. "You are not looking in the right direction. There—here—just going to pass——"

"Oh, the man with Fanny, you mean," said Gervase. "That's Taylor, of the 100th."

Lady Belton compressed her lips and raised her sandy eyebrows as her eagle eyes followed the couple round the room.

"H'm!" she said; then, with no apparent connection, "Miles is not here, I suppose?"

"No," said Gervase. "He stayed at home."

"But I mustn't keep you young folk from dancing," said Lady Belton, standing back with a large smile and revealing the form of her small daughter behind her. "Have you got a programme, Agnes, darling? Gervase wants some dances."

"Will you dance this?" said Gervase hastily, to escape the programme that was being produced.

"Yes, but you had better get her to keep some for you later on," said Lady Belton. "She is much in request, but, you know," she went on confidentially, sidling closer to Gervase, "I don't want her to dance with all these unknown young men. One doesn't know who they are. Mrs. Marsters was most anxious to introduce her to several of her party, and I told her I was really very much obliged, but Agnes had plenty of partners. Mrs. Marsters is a very nice, charming person, but one doesn't know where she gets her young men from."

"Perhaps from Whiteley," said Gervase sarcastically.

"One never knows," said Lady Belton solemnly. "At any rate, I have told Agnes not to dance with any one before I have given permission."

Gervase whisked Agnes off into the whirlpool of dancers. He was very fond of Lady Belton. He knew her to be all that was good and high-principled and aristocratic, but to-night these qualities did not appeal to him.

"What a good floor, but rather too slippery!" said Agnes when they paused after a short and rather disastrous turn. She was a bad dancer, invariably trod on her partner's toes and hung desperately on his arm, and grew breathless and giddy after a single turn.

After the first turn, Gervase did not offer to go on. He leant against the wall in silence and watched Gertrude from under his eyelids. She and the little dark man were dancing smoothly round the room in perfect unison, cool and untiring.

Agnes' eyes followed the direction of Gervase's, and she had a pang of jealousy when she caught sight of Gertrude. She had forgotten that her rival was to be at the ball, and had looked forward to the dance with unmixed pleasure, knowing that Gervase was to be there. She glanced at him timidly. It was plain to her that his mind was wholly engrossed with Gertrude. A wave of jealous anger swept over her.

For the first time in her life she hated Gervase, but anger made her bold. She began to talk and exerted herself to interest and please him.

Gervase was surprised. He had never known her so garrulous, or seen her look so pretty. Gradually he recovered his good

humour. The next dance would be with Gertrude. The black cloud of his ill-humour disappeared before the bright sun of the delightful anticipation. To dance with Gertrude—the blood tingled in his veins as he thought of it.

"Come on," he said to Agnes in high spirits, and he seized her and whirled her round, regardless of her stumbling steps, until she was obliged to cry, "Stop!"

"Why, Agnes, you're gone in the wind, I'm afraid," he said, with the reckless candour of a brotherly cousin. "Come on; try again."

He laughed loudly, with a boyish love of teasing, as she slipped and panted and begged him to stop. He bore her on, and refused to stop, laughing at her entreaties. All the time a voice in his heart was shouting in time to the music, "With *her* next! with *her* next!"

But it was not to be.

After he had taken Agnes back to her mother, he met a married lady of his acquaintance, one who could by no possibility be ignored. She had just arrived, very late and rather bored, attracting all eyes by her beauty and the splendour of her diamonds. She was a great lady, and Gervase had often enjoyed her hospitality. She liked him, and he was, besides, the only man she saw in the room that she knew. The next two dances were hers, and then she introduced him to two ladies of her party. By this time the supper-room was opened, and Mr. Marsters requested him to feed Lady Belton.

Poor Gervase! The fates were against him. His spirits sank again into his boots, and he grew morose and more and more savage and moody as time went on, and still Lady Belton sat ruminating and munching in a dignified bovine manner.

The ball was nearly over before he was at last free to dance with Gertrude.

CHAPTER XIV.

IF Gervase's enjoyment was small, Gertrude's was less. He merely chafed at the delay, but her feelings were more complicated.

The appearance of George Allison had set her head in a whirl. Her brain had been bewildered before with conflicting emotions,

but his presence added yet another shuttle to the tangled machinery.

At first she had felt nothing but annoyance that he should have turned up at this juncture, and her response to his delighted greeting would have chilled any man but him. But he was so pleased to see her, so kind and manly in his attentions, that she had not the heart or the impertinence to be rude to him.

"I knew you were going to be here," he said confidentially. "As you know, I am not much of a society man, much less a dancing man, and when I got Mrs. Wightman's kind invitation my first impulse was to refuse it, but luckily I happened to meet your mother in Upperton the same day, and she mentioned that you were staying on at Blackwaters for a dance at the Masterses'. I consulted Mrs. Wightman's letter, saw that it was the same dance, decided to go, and—here I am."

"Here you are, indeed, and I wish to goodness you were anywhere else!" was Gertrude's thought as she smiled a sickly smile.

"Have you been enjoying yourself?" he inquired next. "But of course you have. You always do when you get among kindred spirits. Now do point me out some of your friends. Which is Lady Frances? Ah! in pink satin and diamonds? I thought so. And the men of your party—which are they?"

Gertrude pointed them all out, except Gervase.

"Rather a young lot, aren't they?" he said critically. "They all seem mere boys to me. But then I suppose I am beginning to be middle-aged."

"Captain Taylor is not a boy," said Gertrude.

"No, he is the only one. But tell me, who is that tall, good-looking chap over there, talking to the lady with the crown?"

"Oh, that is another of our party," said Gertrude with studied carelessness, "Mr. Gervase Delvin, Lady Fanny's brother."

"He looks a good sort of a fellow," said Mr. Allison; "in the 90th, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"They're very hard up, those Delvins," he went on tranquilly. "I don't know how he manages to be in the 90th at all. His elder brother is as poor as a church mouse—for his position, I mean. Why, he has to let his place; but I believe his wife has money."

"Do you know them?" said Gertrude in surprise.

"Oh dear no," he said, "but they employ an old uncle of mine as their solicitor occasionally. That's how I know anything about them. Shall we take another turn?"

As dance after dance went by Gertrude's heart grew heavier. She had plenty of partners, she danced everything, but Gervase never came. The fiddles shrieked; the 'cello moaned; the music rose and fell in ecstasies of gaiety and sadness; the dancers whirled and smiled and panted and grew warm and smiled again indefatigably. On and on, with partner after partner, she went in a sort of dream, while a dull pain gnawed at her heart. She talked and laughed, she danced, sat out, went to supper, and as she did so her lips grew pale, her dark eyes darker and wider.

George Allison thought he had never seen her look so beautiful. He grew silent, and watched her, fascinated, stupefied, bewildered, and with a purpose rapidly maturing into determination in his breast.

He loved her; he had known it for long. There was no other woman in the world for him; he meant to ask her to be his wife some day. But why put it off? Why wait? There was nothing to wait for. His slow brain caught fire at the bare idea of making this treasure his own now, at once, without an hour's delay. At the end of the dance he left abruptly, found a quiet corner and sat down to think and to make up his mind.

He did not approve of proposing in a ball-room; he would rather have asked her quietly in some country garden, or in her father's house; but, after all, what were such advantages worth weighed in the balance with his suddenly conceived purpose of striking the blow *now*? His intention of proposing had been conceived long ago, and had been gradually gathering weight, until it was no longer to be denied. It had suddenly become a vital necessity. It would brook no delay.

Heaven knew, he might not have another opportunity of seeing her alone for months. It was by the merest chance he had met her walking alone a fortnight ago. The perspiration broke out on his brow as he thought of the many difficulties that would arise at home, children and servants, Colonel Aylmer, his own mother, constantly cropping up at the very moment they were not wanted. Yes, it would be a mercy to get it over and all settled away from home, and then they could go home and make the announcement,

which would certainly be greeted with acclamations of joy on all sides. How delightful to surprise them all!

That she would refuse him never entered his calculations. They were not subtle enough to suggest such a possibility. Besides, everything that had happened in the past was of a nature to give him confidence.

"I'll do it," he said with a slap on his knee, and, bold as a lion, he went back to the ball-room.

(To be concluded.)